







# **TABLE-TALK.**





**TABLE-TALK :**  
  
**OR,**  
  
**ORIGINAL ESSAYS,**

**BY WILLIAM HAZLITT.**

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**VOL. I.**

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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THE work here offered to the public is a selection from the four volumes of *TABLE-TALK*, printed in London. Should it meet with success, it will be followed by two other volumes of the same description, which will include all that the author wishes to preserve of his writings in this kind. The title may perhaps serve to explain what there is of peculiarity in the style or mode of treating the subjects. I had remarked that when I had written or thought upon a particular topic, and afterwards had occasion to speak of it with a friend, the conversation generally took

a much wider range and branched off into a number of indirect and collateral questions, which were not strictly connected with the original view of the subject, but which often threw a curious and striking light upon it, or upon human life in general. It therefore occurred to me as possible to combine the advantages of these two styles, the *literary* and *conversational*; or after stating and enforcing some leading idea, to follow it up by such observations and reflections as would probably suggest themselves in discussing the same question in company with others. This seemed to me to promise a greater variety and richness, and perhaps a greater sincerity, than could be attained by a more precise and scholastic method. The same consideration had an influence on the familiarity and conversational idiom of the style which I have used. How far the plan was feasible, or how far I

have succeeded in the execution of it, must be left to others to decide. I am also afraid of having too frequently attempted to give a popular air and effect to subtle distinctions and trains of thought; so that I shall be considered as too metaphysical by the careless reader, while by the more severe and scrupulous inquirer my style will be complained of as too light and desultory. To all this I can only answer that I have done not what I wished, but the best I could do; and I heartily wish it had been better.



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## ESSAY I.

### ON THE PLEASURE OF PAINTING.

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• “THERE is a pleasure in painting which none but painters know.” In writing, you have to contend with the world; in painting, you have only to carry on a friendly strife with Nature. You sit down to your task, and are happy. From the moment that you take up the pencil, and look Nature in the face, you are at peace with your own heart. No angry passions rise to disturb the silent progress of the work, to shake the hand, or dim the brow : no irritable humours are set afloat : you have no absurd opinions to combat, no point to strain, no adversary to crush, no fool to annoy—you are actuated by fear or favour to no man. There is “no juggling here,” no sophistry, no intrigue, no tampering with the evidence, no attempt to make black white, or white black : but you resign yourself into the hands of a greater power, that of Nature,

ON THE PLEASURE •

with the simplicity of a child, and the devotion of an enthusiast—

“ Study with joy

Her manner, and with rapture taste her style ”

The mind is calm, and full at the same time. The hand and eye are equally employed. In tracing the commonest object, a plant or the stump of a tree, you learn something every moment. You perceive unexpected differences, and discover likenesses where you looked for no such thing. You try to set down what you see—find out your error, and correct it. You need not play tricks, or purposely mistake : with all your pains, you are still far short of the mark. Patience grows out of the endless pursuit, and turns it into a luxury. A streak in a flower, a wrinkle in a leaf, a tinge in a cloud, a stain in an old wall or ruin grey, are seized with avidity as the *spolia opima* of this sort of mental warfare, and furnish out labour for another half-day. The hours pass on untold, without chagrin, and without weariness ; nor would you ever wish to pass them otherwise. Innocence is joined with industry, pleasure with business ;

and the mind is satisfied, though it is not engaged in thinking or in doing harm.'

' There is a passage in *Wester* which contains a very pleasing illustration of this doctrine, and is as follows.

" About a league from the town is a place called *Walheim*. It is very agreeably situated on the side of a hill : from one of the paths which leads out of the village, you have a view of the whole country ; and there is a good old woman who sells wine, coffee, and tea there : but better than all this are two lime-trees before the church, which spread their branches over a little green, surrounded by barns and cottages. I have seen few places more retired and peaceful. I send for a chair and table from the old woman's, and there I drink my coffee and read *Homer*. It was by accident that I discovered this place one fine afternoon : all was perfect stillness ; every body was in the fields, except a little boy about four years old, who was sitting on the ground, and holding between his knees a child of about six months ; he pressed it to his bosom with his little arms, which made a sort of great chair for it ; and notwithstanding the vivacity which sparkled in his eyes, he sat perfectly still. Quite delighted with the scene, I sat down on a plough opposite, and had great pleasure in drawing this little picture of brotherly tenderness. I added a bit of the hedge, the barn-door, and some broken cart-wheels, without any order, just as they happened to lie ; and in about an hour I found I had made a drawing of great expression and very correct design, without having put in any thing of my own. This confirmed me in the resolution I had made before, only to copy nature for the future. Nature is inexhaustible, and alone forms the greatest masters. Say what you will of rules, they alter the true features, and the natural expression.' *Page 15.*

I have not much pleasure in writing these Essays, or in reading them afterwards; though I own I now and then meet with a phrase that I like, or a thought that strikes me as a true one. But after I begin them, I am only anxious to get to the end of them, which I am not sure I shall do, for I seldom see my way a page or even a sentence beforehand; and when I have as by a miracle escaped, I trouble myself little more about them. I sometimes have to write them twice over: then it is necessary to read the *proof*, to prevent mistakes by the printer; so that by the time they appear in a tangible shape, and one can con them over with a conscious, sidelong glance to the public approbation, they have lost their gloss and relish, and become "more tedious than a twice-told tale." For a person to read his own works over with any great delight, he ought first to forget that he ever wrote them. Familiarity naturally breeds contempt. It is, in fact, like poring fondly over a piece of blank paper: from repetition, the words convey no distinct meaning to the mind, are mere idle sounds, except that our vanity claims an

- interest and property in them. I have more satisfaction in my own thoughts than in dictating them to others : words are necessary to explain the impression of certain things upon me to the reader, but they rather weaken and draw a veil over than strengthen it to myself.
- However I might say with the poet, “ My mind to me a kingdom is, ” yet I have little ambition “ to set a throne or chair of state in the understandings of other men.” The ideas we cherish most, exist best in a kind of shadowy abstraction,

“ Pure in the last recesses of the mind ; ”

and derive neither force nor interest from being exposed to public view. They are old-established acquaintance, and any change in them, arising from the adventitious ornaments of style or dress, is hardly to their advantage. After I have once written on a subject, it goes out of my mind : my feelings about it have been melted down into words, and *them* I forget. I have, as it were, discharged my memory of its habitual reckoning, and rubbed out the score of real sentiment. In fu-

ture, it exists only for the sake of others.

But I cannot say, from my own experience, that the same process takes place in transferring our ideas to canvas; they gain more than they lose in the mechanical transformation. One is never tired of painting, because you have to set down not what you knew already, but what you have just discovered. In the former case, you translate feelings into words; in the latter, names into things. There is a continual creation out of nothing going on. With every stroke of the brush, a new field of inquiry is laid open; new difficulties arise, and new triumphs are prepared over them. By comparing the imitation with the original, you see what you have done, and how much you have still to do. The test of the senses is severer than that of fancy, and an overmatch even for the delusions of our self-love. One part of a picture shames another, and you determine to paint up to yourself, if you cannot come up to nature. Every object becomes lustrous from the light thrown back upon it by the mirror of art: and by the aid of the pencil we may be said to touch and handle

the objects of sight. The air-wove visions that hover on the verge of existence have a bodily presence given them on the canvas : the form of beauty is changed into a substance : the dream and the glory of the universe is made “palpable to feeling as to sight.” —And see ! a rainbow starts from the canvas, with all its humid train of glory, as if it were drawn from its cloudy arch in heaven. The spangled landscape glitters with drops of dew after the shower. The “fleecey fools” shew their coats in the gleams of the setting sun. The shepherds pipe their farewell notes in the fresh evening air. And is this bright vision made from a dead dull blank, like a bubble reflecting the mighty fabric of the universe ? Who would think this miracle of Rubens’s pencil possible to be performed ? Who, having seen it, would not spend his life to do the like ? See how the rich fallows, the bare stubble-field, the scanty harvest-home, drag in Rembrandt’s landscapes ! How often have I looked at them and nature, and tried to do the same, till the very “light thickened,” and there was an earthiness in the feeling of



the air ! There is no end of the refinements of art and nature in this respect. One may look at the misty glimmering horizon, till the eye dazzles, and the imagination is lost in the hope to transfer the whole interminable expanse at one blow upon the canvas. Wilson said, he endeavoured to pain the effect of the motes dancing in the setting sun. At another time, a friend coming into his painting-room, when he was sitting on the ground in a melancholy posture, observed that his picture looked like a landscape after a shower : he started up with the greatest delight, and said, “ That is the effect I intended to represent, but thought I had failed.” Wilson was neglected ; and, by degrees, neglected his art to apply himself to brandy. His hand became unsteady, so that it was only by repeated attempts that he could reach the place, or produce the effect he aimed at ; and when he had done a little to a picture, he would say to any acquaintance who chanced to drop in, “ I have painted enough for one day : come, let us go somewhere.” It was not so Claude left his pictures, or his studies on the banks of the Tiber, to

go in search of other enjoyments, or ceased to gaze upon the glittering sunny vales and distant hills; and while his eye drank in the clear sparkling hues and lovely forms of nature, his hand stamped them on the lucid canvas to remain there for ever!—One of the most delightful parts of my life was one fine summer, when I used to walk out of an evening to catch the last light of the sun, gemming the green slopes or russet lawns, and gilding tower or tree, while the blue sky gradually turning to purple and gold, or skirted with dusky grey, hung its broad marble pavement over all, as we see it in the great master of Italian landscape. But to come to a more particular explanation of the subject.

The first head I ever tried to paint was an old woman with the upper part of the face shaded by her bonnet, and I certainly laboured it with great perseverance. It took me numberless sittings to do it. I have it by me still, and sometimes look at it with surprise, to think how much pains were thrown away to little purpose,—yet not altogether in vain, if it taught me to see good in every thing, and

to know that there is nothing vulgar in nature seen with the eye of science or of true art. Refinement creates beauty every-where : it is the grossness of the spectator that discovers nothing but grossness in the object. Be this as it may, I spared no pains to do my best. If art was long, I thought that life was so too at that moment. I got in the general effect the first day ; and pleased and surprised enough I was at my success. The rest was a work of time—of weeks and months (if need were), of patient toil and careful finishing. I had seen an old head by Rembrandt at Burleigh-House; and if I could produce a head at all like Rembrandt in a year, in my life-time, it would be glory and felicity and wealth and fame enough for me ! The head I had seen at Burleigh was an exact and wonderful fac-simile of nature, and I resolved to make mine (as nearly as I could) an exact fac-simile of nature. I did not then, nor do I now believe with Sir Joshua, that the perfection of art consists in giving general appearances without individual details, but in giving general appearances with individual details. Otherwise, I

had done my work the first day. But I saw something more in nature than general effect, and I thought it worth my while to give it in the picture. There was a gorgeous effect of light and shade : but there was a delicacy as well as depth in the *chiaro-scuro*, which I was bound to follow into all its dim and scarce perceptible variety of tone and shadow. Then I had to make the transition from a strong light to as dark a shade, preserving the masses, but gradually softening off the intermediate parts. It was so in nature : the difficulty was to make it so in the copy. I tried, and failed again and again ; I strove harder, and succeeded, as I thought. The wrinkles in Rembrandt were not hard lines ; but broken and irregular. I saw the same appearance in nature, and strained every nerve to give it. If I could hit off this crumbling appearance, and insert the reflected light in the furrows of old age in half a morning, I did not think I had lost a day. Beneath the shrivelled yellow parchment look of the skin, there was here and there a streak of blood-colour tinging the face ; this I made a point of conveying, and did not cease to

compare what I saw with what I did (with jealous, lynx-eyed watchfulness) till I succeeded to the best of my ability and judgment. How many revisions were there! How many attempts to catch an expression, which I had seen the day before! How often did we strive to get the old position, and wait for the return of the same light! There was a puckering up of the lips, a cautious introversion of the eye under the shadow of the bonnet, indicative of the feebleness and suspicion of old age, which at last we managed, after many trials and some quarrels, to a tolerable nicety. The picture was never finished, and I might have gone on with it to the present hour.\* I used to set it on the ground when my day's work was done, and saw revealed to me with swimming eyes the birth of new hopes and of a new world of objects.—The painter thus learns to look at nature with different eyes. He before saw her “as in a glass darkly, but now face to face.” He understands the texture and

\* It is at present covered with a thick slough of oil and varnish (the perishable vehicle of the English school) like an envelope of gold-beaters' skin, so as to be hardly visible.

meaning of the visible universe, and “sees into the life of things,” not by the help of mechanical instruments, but of the improved exercise of his faculties, and an intimate sympathy with nature. The meanest thing is not lost upon him, for he looks at it with an eye to itself, not merely to his own vanity or interest, or the opinion of the world. Even where there is neither beauty nor use—if that ever were—still there is truth, and a sufficient source of gratification in the indulgence of curiosity and activity of mind. The humblest painter is a true scholar; and the best of scholars—the scholar of nature. For myself, and for the real comfort and satisfaction of the thing, I had rather have been Jan Steen, or Gerard Dow, than the greatest castruist or philologer that ever lived. The painter does not view things in clouds or “mist, the common gloss of theologians,” but applies the same standard of truth and disinterested spirit of inquiry, that influence his daily practice, to other subjects. He perceives form; he distinguishes character. He reads men and books with an intuitive glance. He is a

critic as well as a connoisseur. The conclusions he draws are clear and convincing, because they are taken from actual experience. He is not a fanatic, a dupe, or a slave: for the habit of seeing for himself also disposes him to judge for himself. The most sensible men I know (taken as a class) are painters; that is, they are the most lively observers of what passes in the world about them, and the closest observers of what passes in their own minds. From their profession they in general mix more with the world than authors; and if they have not the same fund of acquired knowledge, are obliged to rely more on individual sagacity. I might mention the names of Opie, Fuseli, Northcote, as persons distinguished for striking description and acquaintance with the subtle traits of character.\* Painters in ordinary society, or in obscure situations where their value is not known, and they are treated with neglect and

\* Men in business, who are answerable with their fortunes for the consequences of their opinions, and are therefore accustomed to ascertain pretty accurately the grounds on which they act, before they commit themselves on the event, are often

indifference, have sometimes a forward self-sufficiency of manner : but this is not so much their fault as that of others. Perhaps their want of regular education may also be in fault in such cases. Richardson, who is very tenacious of the respect in which the profession ought to be held, tells a story of Michael Angelo, that after a quarrel between him and Pope Julius II, “ upon account of a slight the artist conceived the pontiff had put upon him, Michael Angelo was introduced by a bishop, who, thinking to serve the artist by it, made it an argument that the Pope should be reconciled to him, because men of his profession were commonly ignorant, and of no consequence otherwise : his holiness, enraged at the bishop, struck him with his staff, and told him, it was he that was the block-head, and affronted the man himself would not offend ; the prelate was driven out of the chamber, and Michael Angelo had the Pope’s

men of remarkably quick and sound judgments. Artists in like manner must know tolerably well what they are about, before they can bring the result of their observations to the test of ocular demonstration.



benediction accompanied with presents. This bishop had fallen into the vulgar error, and was rebuked accordingly.”

Besides the employment of the mind, painting exercises the body. It is a mechanical as well as a liberal art. To do any thing, to dig a hole in the ground, to plant a cabbage, to hit a mark, to move a shuttle, to work a pattern, —in a word, to attempt to produce any effect, and to *succeed*, has something in it that gratifies the love of power, and carries off the restless activity of the mind of man. Indolence is a delightful but distressing state : we must be doing something to be happy. Action is no less necessary than thought to the instinctive tendencies of the human frame ; and painting combines them both incessantly. The hand furnishes a practical test of the correctness of the eye ; and the eye, thus admonished, imposes fresh tasks of skill and industry upon the hand. Every stroke tells, as the verifying of a new truth ; and every new obser-

• The famous Schiller used to say, that he found the great happiness of life after all, to consist in the discharge of some mechanical duty.

vation, the instant it is made, passes into an act and emanation of the will. Every step is nearer what we wish, and yet there is always more to do. In spite of the facility, the fluttering grace, the evanescent hues, that play round the pencil of Rubens and Vandyke, however I may admire, I do not envy them this power so much as I do the slow, patient, laborious execution of Correggio, Leonardo da Vinci, and Andrea del Sarto, where every touch appears conscious of its charge, emulous of truth, and where the painful artist has "so distinctly wrought,"

.. 'That you might almost say his picture thought!'

In the one case, the colours seem breathed on the canvas as by magic, the work and the wonder of a moment : in the other, they seem inlaid in the body of the work, and as if it took the artist years of unremitting labour, and of delightful never-ending progress to perfection.' Who would wish ever to

' The rich *impasting* of Titian and Giorgione combines nothing of the advantages of both these styles, the felicity of the one with the carefulness of the other, and is perhaps to be preferred to either

come to the close of such works,—not to dwell on them, to return to them, to be wedded to them to the last? Rubens, with his florid, rapid style, complained that when he had just learned his art, he should be forced to die. Leonardo, in the slow advances of his, had lived long enough!

Painting is not, like writing, what is properly understood by a sedentary employment. It requires not indeed a strong, but a continued and steady exertion of muscular power. The precision and delicacy of the manual operation makes up for the want of vehemence,—as to balance himself for any time in the same position the rope-dancer must strain every nerve. Painting for a whole morning gives one as excellent an appetite for one's dinner, as old Abraham Tucker acquired for his by riding over Banstead Downs. It is related of Sir Joshua Reynolds, that “he took no other exercise than what he used in his painting-room,”—the writer means, in walking backwards and forwards to look at his picture; but the act of painting itself, of laying on the colours in the proper place and pro-

per quantity, was a much harder exercise than this alternate receding from and returning to the picture. The last would be rather a relaxation and relief than an effort. It is not to be wondered at, that an artist like Sir Joshua, who delighted so much in the sensual and practical part of his art, should have found himself at a considerable loss when the decay of his sight precluded him, for the last year or two of his life, from the following up of his profession,—“the source,” according to his own remark, “of thirty years’ uninterrupted enjoyment and prosperity to him.” It is only those who never think at all, or else who have accustomed themselves to brood invariably on abstract ideas, that never feel *ennui*.

To give one instance more, and then I will have done with this rambling discourse. One of my first attempts was a picture of my father, who was then in a green old age, with strong-marked features, and scarred with the small-pox. I drew it with a broad light crossing the face, looking down, with spectacles on, reading. The book was Shaftesbury’s *Cha-*

*racteristics*, in a fine old binding, with Gri-  
belin's etchings. My father would as lieve  
it had been any other book; but for him to  
read was to be content, was "riches fineless."  
The sketch promised well; and I set to work  
to finish it, determined to spare no time nor  
pains. My father was willing to sit as long as  
I pleased; for there is a natural desire in the  
mind of man to sit for one's picture, to be the  
object of continued attention, to have one's  
likeness multiplied; and besides his satisfac-  
tion in the picture, he had some pride in the  
artist, though he would rather I should have  
written a sermon than have painted like Rem-  
brandt or like Raphael! Those winter days,  
with the gleams of sunshine coming through  
the chapel-windows, and cheered by the  
notes of the robin-redbreast in our garden (that  
"ever in the haunch of winter sings")—as  
my after-noon's work drew to a close,—were  
among the happiest of my life. When I gave  
the effect I intended to any part of the picture  
for which I had prepared my colours, when  
I imitated the roughness of the skin by a  
lucky stroke of the pencil, when I hit the

clear pearly tone of a vein, when I gave the ruddy complexion of health, the blood circulating under the broad shadows of one side of the face, I thought my fortune made; or rather it was already more than made, in my fancying that I might one day be able to say with Correggio, "*I also am a painter!*" It was an idle thought, a boy's conceit; but it did not make me less happy at the time. I used regularly to set my work in the chair to look at it through the long evenings; and many a time did I return to take leave of it, before I could go to bed at night. I remember sending it with a throbbing heart to the Exhibition, and seeing it hung up there by the side of one of the Honourable Mr. Skeffington (now Sir George). There was nothing in common between them, but that they were the portraits of two very good-natured men. I think, but am not sure, that I finished this portrait (or another afterwards) on the same day that the news of the battle of Austerlitz came; I walked out in the afternoon, and, as I returned, saw the evening star set over a poor man's cottage with other thoughts and

feelings than I shall ever have again. O for the revolution of the great Platonic year, that those times might come over again! I could sleep out the three hundred and sixty-five thousand intervening years very contentedly! —The picture is left : the table, the chair, the window where I learned to construe Livy, the chapel where my father preached, remain where they were; but he himself is gone to rest, full of years, of faith, of hope, and charity!

## ESSAY II.

### THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

THE painter not only takes a delight in nature, he has a new and exquisite source of pleasure opened to him in the study and contemplation of works of art—

“Whate’er Lorraine light touch’d with soft’ning hue,  
Or savage Rosa dash’d, or learned Poussin drew.”

He turns aside to view a country-gentleman’s seat with eager looks, thinking it may contain some of the rich products of art. There is an air round Lord Radnor’s park, for there hang the two Claudes, the *Morning* and *Evening of the Roman Empire*—round Wilton-house, for there is Vandyke’s picture of the Pembroke family—round Blenheim, for there is his picture of the Duke of Buckingham’s children, and the most magnificent collection of Rubenses in the world—at Knowsley, for there



is Rembrandt's *Hand-writing on the Wall*—and at Burleigh, for there are some of Guido's angelic heads. The young artist makes a pilgrimage to each of these places, eyes them wistfully at a distance, “bosomed high in tufted trees,” and feels an interest in them of which the owner is scarce conscious : he enters the well-swept walks and echoing archways, passes the threshold, is led through wainscoted rooms, is shown the furniture, the rich hangings, the tapestry, the massy services of plate—and, at last, is ushered into the room where his treasure is, the object of his vows—some speaking face or bright landscape ! It is stamped on his brain, and lives there thenceforward, a clue to nature, and a test of art. He furnishes out the chambers of the mind from the spoils of time, picks and chooses which shall have the best places—nearest his heart. He goes away richer than he came, richer than the possessor ; and thinks that he may one day return, when he perhaps shall have done something of the same kind, or even from failure shall have learned to admire truth and genius more.

My first initiation in the mysteries of the art was at the Orleans Gallery : it was there I formed my taste, such as it is ; so that I am irreclaimably of the old school in painting. I was staggered when I saw the works there collected, and looked at them with wondering and with longing eyes. A mist passed away from my sight : the scales fell off. A new sense came upon me, a new heaven and a new earth stood before me. I saw the soul speaking in the face,—“hands that the rod of empire had swayed” in mighty ages past—“a forked mountain or blue promontory,”

———“with trees upon’t

That nod unto the world, and mock our eyes with air.”

Old Time had unlocked his treasures and Fame stood portress at the door. We had all heard of the names of Titian, Raphael, Guido, Domenichino, the Caracci—but to see them face to face, to be in the same room with their deathless productions, was like breaking some potent spell—was almost an effect of necromancy! From that time I lived in a world of pictures. Battles, sieges, speeches

in parliament seemed mere idle noise and fury, "signifying nothing," compared with those mighty works and dreaded names that spoke to me in the eternal silence of thought. This was the more remarkable, as it was but a short time before that I was not only totally ignorant of but insensible to the beauties of art. As an instance, I remember that one afternoon I was reading the Provoked Husband with the highest relish, with a green woody landscape of Ruysdael or Hobbima just before me, at which I looked off the book now and then, and wondered what there could be in that sort of work to satisfy or delight the mind—at the same time asking myself, as a speculative question, whether I should ever feel an interest in it like what I took in reading Vanbrugh and Cibber?

I had made some progress in painting when I went to the Louvre to study, and I never did any thing afterwards. I never shall forget conning over the Catalogue which a friend lent me just before I set out. The pictures, the names of the painters, seemed to relish in the mouth. There was one of Titian's Mis-

•tress at her toilette. Even the colours with which the painter had adorned her hair were not more golden, more amiable to sight, than those which played round and tantalised my fancy ere I saw the picture. There were two portraits by the same hand—"A young Nobleman with a glove"—Another, "a Companion to it"—I read the description over and over with fond expectancy, and filled up the imaginary outline with whatever I could conceive of grace and dignity and an antique *gusto*—all but equal to the original. There was the Transfiguration too. With what awe I saw it in my mind's eye, and was overshadowed with the spirit of the artist! Not to have been disappointed with these works afterwards, was the highest compliment I can pay to their transcendant merits. Indeed, it was from seeing other works of the same great masters that I had formed a vague, but no disparaging idea of these.—The first day I got there, I was kept for some time in the French Exhibition-room, and thought I should not be able to get a sight of the Old Masters. I just caught a peep at them through the door (vile hin-

drance!) like looking out of purgatory into paradise—from Poussin's noble mellow-looking landscapes to where Rubens hung out his gaudy banner, and down the glimmering vista to the rich jewels of Titian and the Italian school. At last, by much importunity, I was admitted, and lost not an instant in making use of my new privilege. It was *un beau jour* to me. I marched delighted through a quarter of a mile of the proudest efforts of the mind of man, a whole creation of genius, a universe of art! I ran the gauntlet of all the schools from the bottom to the top; and in the end got admitted into the inner room, where they had been repairing some of their greatest works. Here the Transfiguration, the St. Peter Martyr, and the St. Jerome of Domenichino stood on the floor, as if they had bent their knees, like camels stooping, to unlade their riches to the spectator. On one side, on an easel, stood Hippolito de Medici (a portrait by Titian) with a boar-spear in his hand, looking through those he saw, till you turned away from the keen glance: and thrown together in heaps were landscapes of the same

hand, green pastoral hills and vales, and shepherds piping to their mild mistresses underneath the flowering shade. Reader, "if thou hast not seen the Louvre, thou art damned!"—for thou hast not seen the choicest remains of the works of art; or thou hast not seen all these together, with their mutually reflected glories. I say nothing of the statues; for I know but little of sculpture, and never liked any, till I saw the Elgin Marbles... Here, for four months together, I strolled and studied, and daily heard the warning sounds—"Quatre heures passées, il faut fermer, Citoyens"—(Ah! why did they ever change their style?) muttered in coarse provincial French; and brought away with me some loose draughts and fragments, which I have been forced to part with, like drops of life-blood, for "hard money." How often, thou tenantless mansion of godlike magnificence—how often has my heart since gone a pilgrimage to thee!

It has been made a question, whether the artist, or the mere man of taste and natural sensibility, receives most pleasure from the contemplation of works of art? And I think

this question might be answered by another as a sort of *experimentum crucis*, namely, whether any one out of that “number numberless” of mere gentlemen and amateurs, who visited Paris at the period here spoken of, felt as much interest, as much pride or pleasure in this display of the most striking monuments of art as the humblest student would? The first entrance into the Louvre would be only one of the events of his journey, not an event in his life, remembered ever after with thankfulness and regret. He would explore it with the same unmeaning curiosity and idle wonder as he would the Regalia in the Tower, or the Botanic Specimens in the *Jardin des Plantes*, but not with the fond enthusiasm of an artist. How should he? His is “casual fruition, joyless, unendeared.” But the painter is wedded to his art, the mistress, queen, and idol of his soul. He has embarked his all in it, fame, time, fortune, peace of mind, his hopes in youth, his consolation in age : and shall he not feel a more intense interest in whatever relates to it than the mere indolent trifler? Natural sensibility alone, without

the entire application of the mind to that one object, will not enable the possessor to sympathise with all the degrees of beauty and power in the conceptions of a Titian or a Correggio ; but it is he only who does this, who follows them into all their force and matchless grace, that does or can feel their full value. Knowledge is pleasure as well as power. No one but the artist, who has studied nature and contended with the difficulties of art, can be apprised of the beauties, or intoxicated with a passion for painting. No one who has not devoted his life and soul to the pursuit of art, can feel the same exultation in its brightest ornaments and loftiest triumphs which an artist does. Where the treasure is, there the heart is also. It is now seventeen years since I was studying in the Louvre (and I have long since given up all thoughts of the art as a profession), but long after I returned, and even still, I sometimes dream of being there again—of asking for the old pictures—and not finding them, or finding them changed or faded from what they were, I cry myself awake ! What gentleman-amateur ever does this at



such a distance of time,—that is, ever received pleasure or took interest enough in them to produce so lasting an impression?

But it is said, that if a person had the same natural taste, and the same acquired knowledge as an artist, without the petty interests and technical notions, he would derive a pure pleasure from seeing a fine portrait, a fine landscape, and so on. This however is not so much begging the question as asking an impossibility : he cannot have the same insight into the end without having studied the means; nor the same love of art without the same habitual and exclusive deference to it. Painters are, no doubt, often actuated by jealousy, partiality, and a sordid attention to that only which they find useful to themselves in painting. Wilkie has been seen poring over the texture of a Dutch cabinet-picture, so that he could not see the picture itself. But this is the perversion and pedantry of the profession, not its true or genuine spirit. If Wilkie had never looked at any thing but *megilps* and handling, he never would have put the soul of life and manners into his pictures as he has

done.—Another objection is, that the instrumental parts of the art, the means, the first rudiments, paints, oils, and brushes, are painful or disgusting; and that the consciousness of the difficulty and anxiety with which perfection has been attained, must take away from the pleasure of the finest performance. This, however, is only an additional proof of the greater pleasure derived by the artist from his profession; for these things which are said to interfere with and destroy the common interest in works of art, do not disturb him; he never once thinks of them, he is absorbed in the pursuit of a higher object; he is intent, not on the means but on the end; he is taken up, not with the difficulties, but with the triumph over them. As in the case of the anatomist, who overlooks many things in the eagerness of his search after abstract truth; or the alchemist who, while he is raking into his soot and furnaces, lives in a golden dream—a lesser gives way to a greater object. But it is pretended that the painter may be supposed to submit to the unpleasant part of the process only for the sake of the fame or profit in view.

So far is this from being a true state of the case, that I will venture to say, in the instance of a friend of mine who has lately succeeded in an important undertaking in his art, that not all the fame he has acquired, not all the money he has received from thousands of admiring spectators, not all the newspaper puffs, —nor even the praise of the *Edinburgh Review*, —not all these, put together, ever gave him at any time the same genuine, undoubted satisfaction as any one half-hour employed in the ardent and propitious pursuit of his art—in finishing to his heart's content a foot, a hand, or even a piece of drapery. What is the state of mind of an artist while he is at work? He is then in the act of realising the highest idea he can form of beauty or grandeur : he conceives, he embodies that which he understands and loves best : that is, he is in full and perfect possession of that which is to him the source of the highest happiness and intellectual excitement which he can enjoy.

In short, as a conclusion to this argument, I will mention a circumstance which fell under my knowledge the other day. A friend had

bought a print of Titian's Mistress, the same to which I have alluded above. He was anxious to show it me on this account. I told him it was a spirited engraving, but it had not the look of the original. I believe he thought this fastidious, till I offered to shew him a rough sketch of it, which I had by me. Having seen this, he said he perceived exactly what I meant, and could not bear to look at the print afterwards. He had good sense enough to see the difference in the individual instance; but a person better acquainted with Titian's manner and with art in general, that is, of a more cultivated and refined taste, would know that it was a bad print, without having any immediate model to compare it with. He would perceive with a glance of the eye, with a sort of instinctive feeling, that it was hard, and without that bland, expansive, and nameless expression which always distinguished Titian's most famous works. Any one who is accustomed to a head in a picture can never reconcile himself to a print from it : but to the ignorant they are both the same. To a vulgar eye there is no difference between a

Guido and a daub, between a penny-print or the vilest scrawl, and the most finished performance. In other words, all that excellence which lies between these two extremes,—all, at least, that marks the excess above mediocrity,—all that constitutes true beauty, harmony, refinement, grandeur, is lost upon the common observer. But it is from this point that the delight, the glowing raptures of the true adept commence. An uninformed spectator may like an ordinary drawing better than the ablest connoisseur; but for that very reason he cannot like the highest specimens of art so well. The refinements not only of execution but of truth and nature are inaccessible to unpractised eyes. The exquisite gradations in a sky of Claude's are not perceived by such persons, and consequently the harmony cannot be felt. Where there is no conscious apprehension, there can be no conscious pleasure. Wonder at the first sight of works of art may be the effect of ignorance and novelty; but real admiration and permanent delight in them are the growth of taste and knowledge. “I would not wish to have your eyes,” said a

good-natured man to a critic, who was finding fault with a picture, in which the other saw no blemish. Why so? The idea which prevented him from admiring this inferior production was a higher idea of truth and beauty which was ever present with him, and a continual source of pleasing and lofty contemplations. It may be different in a taste for outward luxuries and the privations of mere sense; but the idea of perfection, which acts as an intellectual foil, is always an addition, a support, and a proud consolation!

Richardson, in his Essays, which ought to be better known, has left some striking examples of the felicity and infelicity of artists, both as it relates to their external fortune, and to the practice of their art. In speaking of *the knowledge of hands*, he exclaims—"When one is considering a picture or a drawing, one at the same time thinks this was done by him<sup>1</sup> who had many extraordinary endowments of body and mind, but was withal very capricious; who was honoured in life and death, expiring in the arms of one of the greatest princes of that

<sup>1</sup> Leonardo da Vinci.

age, Francis I, king of France, who loved him as a friend. Another is of him<sup>1</sup> who lived a long and happy life, beloved of Charles V, emperor; and many others of the first princes of Europe. When one has another in hand, we think this was done by one<sup>2</sup> who so excelled in three arts, as that any of them in that degree had rendered him worthy of immortality; and one moreover that durst contend with his sovereign (one of the haughtiest popes that ever was) upon a slight offered to him, and extricated himself with honour. Another is the work of him<sup>3</sup> who, without any exterior advantage but mere strength of genius, had the most sublime imaginations, and executed them accordingly, yet lived and died obscurely. Another we shall consider as the work of him<sup>4</sup> who restored Painting when it had almost sunk; of him whom art made honourable, but who neglecting and despising greatness with a sort of cynical pride, was treated suitably to the figure he gave himself, not his intrinsic worth; which, not having

<sup>1</sup> Titian.<sup>2</sup> Michael Angelo.<sup>3</sup> Correggio.<sup>4</sup> Annibal Caracci.

philosophy enough to bear it, broke his heart. Another is done by one<sup>1</sup> who (on the contrary) was a fine gentleman and lived in great magnificence, and was much honoured by his own and foreign princes ; who was a courtier, a statesman, and a painter ; and so much all these, that when he acted in either character, *that* seemed to be his business, and the others his diversion. I say when one thus reflects, besides the pleasure arising from the beauties and excellencies of the work, the fine ideas it gives us of natural things, the noble way of thinking it may suggest to us, an additional pleasure results from the above considerations. But, oh ! the pleasure, when a connoisseur and lover of art has before him a picture or drawing, of which he can say, this is the hand, these are the thoughts of him<sup>2</sup> who was one of the politest, best-natured gentlemen that ever was ; and beloved and assisted by the greatest wits and the greatest men then in Rome : of him who lived in great fame, honour, and magnificence, and died extremely lamented : and missed a Cardinal's hat only by

<sup>1</sup> Rubens.<sup>2</sup> Raffaello.



dying a few months too soon; but was particularly esteemed and favoured by two Popes, the only ones who filled the chair of St. Peter in his time, and as great men as ever sat there since that apostle, if at least he ever did : one, in short, who could have been a Leonardo, a Michael Angelo, a Titian, a Correggio, a Parmegiano, an Annibal, a Rubens, or any other whom he pleased, but none of them could ever have been a Rafaele.” Page 251.

The same writer speaks feelingly of the change in the style of different artists from their change of fortune, and as the circumstances are little known, I will quote the passage relating to two of them.

“Guido Reni from a prince-like affluence of fortune (the just reward of his angelic works) fell to a condition like that of a hired servant to one who supplied him with money for what he did at a fixed rate; and that by his being bewitched with a passion for gaming, whereby he lost vast sums of money; and even what he got in this his state of servitude by day, he commonly lost at night : nor could he ever be cured of this cursed madness.

Those of his works, therefore, which he did in this unhappy part of his life, may *easily be conceived to be in a different style* to what he did before, which in some things, that is, in the airs of his heads (in the gracious kind), had a delicacy in them peculiar to himself, and almost more than human. But I must not multiply instances. Parmegiano is one that alone takes in all the several kinds of variation, and all the degrees of goodness, from the lowest of the indifferent up to the sublime. I can produce evident proofs of this in so easy a gradation, that one cannot deny but that he that did this, might do that, and very probably did so; and thus one may ascend and descend, like the angels on Jacob's ladder, whose foot was upon the earth, but its top reached to Heaven.

“ And this great man had his unlucky circumstance : he became mad after the philosopher's stone, and did but very little in painting or drawing afterwards. Judge what that was, and whether there was not an alteration of style from what he had done before this devil possessed him. His creditors endea-

voured to exorcise him, and did him some good, for he set himself to work again in his own way : but if a drawing I have of a Lucretia be that he made for his last picture, as it probably is (Vasari says that was the subject of it), it is an evident proof of his decay : it is good indeed, but it wants much of the delicacy which is commonly seen in his works ; and so I always thought before I knew or imagined it to be done in this his ebb of genius. *Science of a Connoisseur*. Page 153.

We have had two artists of our own country, whose fate has been as singular as it was hard. Gandy was a portrait-painter in the beginning of the last century, whose heads were said to have come near to Rembrandt's; and he was the undoubted prototype of Sir Joshua Reynolds's style. Yet his name has scarcely been heard of; and his reputation, like his works, never extended beyond his native county. What did he think of himself and of a fame so bounded ! Did he ever dream he was indeed an artist ? Or how did this feeling in him differ from the vulgar conceit of the lowest pretender ? The best

known of his works is a portrait of an alderman of Exeter, in some public building in that city.

Poor Dan. Stringer! Forty years ago he had the finest hand and the clearest eye of any artist of his time, and produced heads and drawings that would not have disgraced a brighter period in the art. But he fell a martyr (like Burns) to the society of country-gentlemen, and then of those whom they would consider as more his equals. I saw him many years ago when he treated the masterly sketches he had by him (one in particular of the group of citizens in Shakspeare “swallowing the tailor’s news”) as “bastards of his genius, not his children;” and seemed to have given up all thoughts of his art. Whether he is since dead, I cannot say : the world do not so much as know that he ever lived !

## ESSAY III.

### ON THE PAST AND FUTURE.

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I HAVE naturally but little imagination, and am not of a very sanguine turn of mind. I have some desire to enjoy the present good, and some fondness for the past ; but I am not at all given to building castles in the air, nor to look forward with much confidence or hope to the brilliant illusions held out by the future. Hence I have perhaps been led to form a theory, which is very contrary to the common notions and feelings on the subject, and which I will here try to explain as well as I can.—When Sterne in the *Sentimental Journey* told the French Minister that if the French people had a fault, it was that they were too serious, the latter replied that if that was his opinion, he must defend it with all his might, for he would have all the world against him ;

so I shall have enough to do to get well through the present argument.

I cannot see, then, any rational or logical ground for that mighty difference in the value which mankind generally set upon the past and future, as if the one was every thing, and the other nothing, of no consequence whatever. On the other hand, I conceive that the past is as real and substantial a part of our being, that it is as much a *bona fide*, undeniable consideration in the estimate of human life, as the future can possibly be. To say that the past is of no importance, unworthy of a moment's regard, because it has gone by, and is no longer any thing, is an argument that cannot be held to any purpose : for if the past has ceased to be, and is therefore to be accounted nothing in the scale of good or evil, the future is yet to come, and has never been any thing. Should any one choose to assert that the present only is of any value in a strict and positive sense, because that alone has a real existence, that we should seize the instant good, and give all else to the winds, I can understand what he means (though

perhaps he does not himself') : but I cannot comprehend how this distinction between that which has a downright and sensible, and that which has only a remote and airy existence, can be applied to establish the preference of the future over the past ; for both are in this point of view equally ideal, absolutely nothing, except as they are conceived of by the mind's eye, and are thus rendered present to the thoughts and feelings. Nay, the one is even more imaginary, a more fantastic creature of the brain than the other, and the interest we take in it more shadowy and gratuitous ; for the future, on which we lay so much stress, may never come to pass at all, that is, may never be embodied into actual existence in the whole course of events, whereas the past has certainly existed once, has received the stamp of truth, and left an image of itself

\* If we take away from *the present* the moment that is just gone by and the moment that is next to come, how much of it will be left for this plain, practical theory to rest upon ? Their solid basis of sense and reality will reduce itself to a pin's point, a hair-line, on which our moral balance-masters will have some difficulty to maintain their footing without falling over on either side.

behind. It is so far then placed beyond the possibility of doubt, or as the poet has it,

“ Those joys are lodg’d beyond the reach of fate.”

It is not, however, attempted to be denied that though the future is nothing at present, and has no immediate interest while we are speaking, yet it is of the utmost consequence in itself, and of the utmost interest to the individual, because it *will have* a real existence, and we have an idea of it as existing in time to come. Well, then, the past also has no real existence; the actual sensation and the interest belonging to it are both fled; but it *has had* a real existence, and we can still call up a vivid recollection of it as having once been; and therefore, by parity of reasoning, it is not a thing perfectly insignificant in itself, nor wholly indifferent to the mind, whether it ever was or not. Oh no! Far from it! Let us not rashly quit our hold upon the past, when perhaps there may be little else left to bind us to existence. Is it nothing to have been, and to have been happy or miserable? Or is it a matter of no moment to think whe-



ther I have been one or the other? Do I delude myself, do I build upon a shadow or a dream, do I dress up in the gaudy garb of idleness and folly a pure fiction, with nothing answering to it in the universe of things and the records of truth, when I look back with fond delight or with tender regret to that which was at one time to me *my all*, when I revive the glowing image of some bright reality,

“ The thoughts of which can never from my heart ?”

Do I then muse on nothing, do I bend my eyes on nothing, when I turn back in fancy to “ those suns and skies so pure” that lighted up my early path? Is it to think of nothing, to set an idle value upon nothing, to think of all that has happened to me, and of all that can ever interest me? Or, to use the language of a fine poet (who is himself among my earliest and not least painful recollections)—

“ What though the radiance which was once so bright  
Be now for ever vanish'd from my sight.  
Though nothing can bring back the hour  
Of glory in the grass, of splendour in the flower”—

yet am I mocked with a lie, when I venture to think of it? Or do I not drink in and breathe again the air of heavenly truth, when I but “retrace its footsteps, and its skirts far off adore?” I cannot say with the same poet—

- “And see how dark the backward stream,  
A little moment past so smiling”—

for it is the past that gives me most delight and most assurance of reality. What to me constitutes the great charm of the Confessions of Rousseau is their turning so much upon this feeling. He seems to gather up the past moments of his being like drops of honey-dew to distil a precious liquor from them; his alternate pleasures and pains are the bead-roll that he tells over, and piously worships; he makes a rosary of the flowers of hope and fancy that strewed his earliest years. When he begins the last of the *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, “*Il y a aujourd’hui, jour des Pâques Fleures, cinquante ans depuis que j’ai premier vu Madame Warens,*” what a yearning of the soul is implied in that short

sentence ! Was all that had happened to him, all that he had thought and felt in that sad interval of time, to be accounted nothing ? Was that long, dim, faded retrospect of years happy or miserable, a blank that was not to make his eyes fail and his heart faint within him in trying to grasp all that had once filled it and that had since vanished, because it was not a prospect into futurity ? Was he wrong in finding more to interest him in it than in the next fifty years—which he did not live to see ; or if he had, what then ? Would they have been worth thinking of, compared with the times of his youth, of his first meeting with Madame Warens, with those times which he has traced with such truth and pure delight “ in our heart’s tables ? ” When “ all the life of life was flown,” was he not to live the first and best part of it over again, and once more be all that he then was ?—Ye woods that crown the clear lone brow of Norman-Court, why do I revisit ye so oft, and feel a soothing consciousness of your presence, but that your high tops waving in the wind recal to me the hours and years that are forever fled, that ye renew

in ceaseless murmurs the story of long-cherished hopes and bitter disappointment, that in your solitudes and tangled wilds I can wander and lose myself, as I wander on and am lost in the solitude of my own heart; and that as your rustling branches give the loud blast to the waste below—borne on the thoughts of other years, I can look down with patient anguish at the cheerless desolation which I feel within! Without that face pale as the primrose with hyacinthine locks, forever shunning and forever haunting me, mocking my waking thoughts as in a dream, without that smile which my heart could never turn to scorn, without those eyes dark with their own lustre, still bent on mine, and drawing the soul into their liquid mazes like a sea of love, without that name trembling in fancy's ear, without that form gliding before me like Oread or Dryad in fabled groves, what should I do, how pass the listless, leaden-footed hours? Then wave, wave on, ye woods of Tudorley, and lift your high tops in the air; my sighs and vows uttered by your mystic voice breathe into me my former being, and

enable me to bear the thing I am!—The objects that we have known in better days are the main props that sustain the weight of our affections, and give us strength to await our future lot. The future is like a dead wall or a thick mist hiding all objects from our view : the past is alive and stirring with objects, bright or solemn, and of unfading interest. What is it in fact that we recur to oftenest? What subjects do we think or talk of? Not the ignorant future, but the well-stored past. Othello, the Moor of Venice, amused himself and his hearers at the house of Signor Brabantio by “running through the story of his life even from his boyish days;” and oft “beguiled them of their tears, when he did speak of some disastrous stroke which his youth suffered.” This plan of ingratiating himself would not have answered, if the past had been, like the contents of an old almanac, of no use but to be thrown aside and forgotten. What a blank, for instance, does the history of the world for the next six thousand years present to the mind, compared with that of the last! All that strikes the imagination or

excites any interest in the mighty scene is *what has been!*\*

Neither in itself then, nor as a subject of general contemplation, has the future any advantage over the past. But with respect to our grosser passions and pursuits it has. As far as regards the appeal to the understanding or the imagination, the past is just as good, as real, of as much intrinsic and ostensible value as the future : but there is another principle in the human mind, the principle of action or will ; and of this the past has no hold, the future engrosses it entirely to itself. It is this strong lever of the affections that gives so powerful a bias to our sentiments on this subject, and violently transposes the natural order of our associations. We regret the plea-

\* A treatise on the Millennium is dull ; but who was ever weary of reading the fables of the Golden Age ? On my once observing I should like to have been Claude, a person said, " he should not, for that then it would by this time have been all over with him." As if it could possibly signify when we live (saving and excepting the present minute), or as if the value of human life decreased or increased with successive centuries. At that rate, we had better have our life still to come at some future period, and so postpone our existence century after century *ad infinitum*.

asures we have lost, and eagerly anticipate those which are to come : we dwell with satisfaction on the evils from which we have escaped (*Posthæc meminisse juvabit*)—and dread future pain. The good that is past is in this sense like money that is spent, which is of no further use, and about which we give ourselves little concern. The good we expect is like a store yet untouched, and in the enjoyment of which we promise ourselves infinite gratification. What has happened to us we think of no consequence : what is to happen to us, of the greatest. Why so? Simply because the one is still in our power, and the other not—because the efforts of the will to bring any object to pass or to prevent it strengthen our attachment or aversion to that object—because the pains and attention bestowed upon any thing add to our interest in it, and because the habitual and earnest pursuit of any end redoubles the ardour of our expectations, and converts the speculative and indolent satisfaction we might otherwise feel in it into real passion. Our regrets, anxiety, and wishes are thrown away upon the past :

but the insisting on the importance of the future is of the utmost use in aiding our resolutions, and stimulating our exertions. If the future were no more amenable to our wills than the past; if our precautions, our sanguine schemes, our hopes and fears, were of as little avail in the one case as in the other; if we could neither soften our minds to pleasure, nor steel our fortitude to the resistance of pain beforehand; if all objects drifted along by us like straws or pieces of wood in a river, the will being purely passive, and as little able to obviate the future as to arrest the past, we should in that case be equally indifferent to both; that is, we should consider each as it affected the thoughts and imagination with certain sentiments of approbation or regret, but without the importunity of desire, the irritation of the will, throwing the whole weight of passion and prejudice into one scale, and leaving the other quite empty. While the blow is coming, we prepare to meet it, we think to ward off or break its force, we arm ourselves with patience to endure what cannot be avoided, we agitate ourselves with fifty



needless alarms about it ; but when the blow is once struck, the pang is over, the struggle is no longer necessary, and we cease to harass or torment ourselves about it more than we can help. It is not that the one belongs to the future, and the other to time past ; but that the one is a subject of action, of uneasy apprehension, of strong passion, and that the other has passed wholly out of the sphere of action into the region of reflection—

“Calm pleasures there abide, majestic pains.”<sup>1</sup>

It would not give a man more concern to know that he should be put to the rack a year hence, than to recollect that he had been put to it a year ago, but that he hopes to avoid the one, whereas he must sit down patiently under the consciousness of the other.

<sup>1</sup> In like manner, though we know that an event must have taken place at a distance, long before we can hear the result, yet as long as we remain in ignorance of it, we irritate ourselves about it, and suffer all the agonies of suspense, as if it were still to come; but as soon as our uncertainty is removed, our fretful impatience vanishes, we resign ourselves to fate, and make up our minds to what has happened as well as we can.

In this hope he wears himself out in vain struggles with fate, and puts himself to the rack of his imagination every day he has to live in the mean while. When the event is so remote or so independent of the will as to set aside the necessity of immediate action, or to baffle all attempts to defeat it, it gives us little more disturbance or emotion than if it had already taken place, or were something to happen in another state of being, or to an indifferent person. Criminals are observed to grow more anxious as their trial approaches; but after the sentence is passed, they become tolerably resigned, and generally sleep sound the night before its execution.

• It in some measure confirms this theory, that men attach more or less importance to past and future events, according as they are more or less engaged in action and the busy scenes of life. Those who have a fortune to make or are in pursuit of rank and power, think little of the past, for it does not contribute greatly to their views : those who have nothing to do but to think, take nearly the same interest in the past as in the future.

The contemplation of the one is as delightful and real as that of the other. The season of hope has an end ; but the remembrance of it is left. The past still lives in the memory of those who have leisure to look back upon the way that they have trod, and can from it “catch glimpses that may make them less forlorn.” The turbulence of action, and uneasiness of desire, must point to the future : it is only in the quiet innocence of shepherds, in the simplicity of pastoral ages, that a tomb was found with this inscription—“ I ALSO WAS AN ARCADIAN ! ”

Though I by no means think that our habitual attachment to life is in exact proportion to the value of the gift, yet I am not one of those splenetic persons who affect to think it of no value at all. *Que peu de chose est la vie humaine*—is an exclamation in the mouths of satirists and philosophers, to which I cannot agree. It is little, it is short, it is not worth having, if we take the last hour, and leave out all that has gone before, which has been one way of looking at the subject. Such calculators seem to say that

life is nothing when it is over, and that may in their sense be true. If the old rule—*Res-pice finem*—were to be made absolute, and no one could be pronounced fortunate till the day of his death, there are few among us whose existence would, upon these conditions, be much to be envied. But this is not a fair view of the case. A man's life is his whole life, not the last glimmering snuff of the candle; and this, I say, is considerable, and not *a little matter*, whether we regard its pleasures or its pains. To draw a peevish conclusion to the contrary from our own superannuated desires or forgetful indifference is about as reasonable as to say, a man never was young because he is grown old, or never lived because he is now dead. The length or agreeableness of a journey does not depend on the few last steps of it; nor is the size of a building to be judged of from the last stone that is added to it. It is neither the first nor last hour of our existence, but the space that parts these two—not our exit nor our entrance upon the stage, but what we do, feel, and think while there—that we

are to attend to in pronouncing sentence upon it. Indeed, it would be easy to shew that it is the very extent of human life, the infinite number of things contained in it, its contradictory and fluctuating interests, the transition from one situation to another, the hours, months, years spent in one fond pursuit after another; that it is, in a word, the length of our common journey with the quantity of events crowded into it, that, baffling the grasp of our actual perception, makes it slide from our memory, and dwindle into nothing in its own perspective. It is too mighty for us, and we say it is nothing! It is a speck in our fancy, and yet what canvas would be big enough to hold its striking groups, its endless subjects! It is light as vanity, and yet if all its weary moments, if all its head and heart aches were compressed into one, what fortitude would not be overwhelmed with the blow! What a huge heap, a "huge, dumb heap," of wishes, thoughts, feelings, anxious cares, soothing hopes, loves, joys, friendships, is it composed of! How many ideas and trains of sentiment,

long and deep and intense, often pass through the mind in only one day's thinking or reading, for instance ! How many such days are there in a year, how many years in a long life, still occupied with something interesting, still recalling some old impression, still recurring to some difficult question and making progress in it, every step accompanied with a sense of power, and every moment conscious of "the high endeavour or the glad success;" for the mind fixes chiefly on that which keeps it employed, and is wound up to a certain pitch of pleasurable excitement or lively solicitude, by the necessity of its own nature. The division of the map of life into its component parts is beautifully made by King Henry VI.

" Oh God ! methinks it were a happy life  
To be no better than a homely swain,  
To sit upon a hill as I do now,  
To carve out dials quaintly, point by point,  
Thereby to see the minutes how they run ;  
How many make the hour full complete,  
How many hours bring about the day,  
How many days will finish up the year,  
How many years a mortal man may live :  
When this is known, then to divide the time ;

So many hours must I tend my flock,  
So many hours must I take my rest,  
So many hours must I contemplate,  
So many hours must I sport myself;  
So many days my ewes have been with young,  
So many weeks ere the poor fools will yearn,  
So many months ere I shall shear the fleece :  
So many minutes, hours, weeks, months, and years  
Past over to the end they were created,  
Would bring grey hairs unto a quiet grave."

I myself am neither a king nor a shepherd : books have been my fleecy charge, and my thoughts have been my subjects. But these have found me sufficient employment at the time, and enough to muse on for the time to come.—

The passions intercept and warp the natural progress of life. They paralyse all of it that is not devoted to their tyranny and caprice. This makes the difference between the laughing innocence of childhood, the pleasantness of youth, and the crabbedness of age. A load of cares lies like a weight of guilt upon the mind : so that a man of business often has all the air, the distraction and restlessness and hurry of feeling of a criminal. A knowledge of the world takes away the freedom and sim-

plicity of thought as effectually as the contagion of its example. The artlessness and candour of our early years are open to all impressions alike, because the mind is not clogged and pre-occupied with other objects. Our pleasures and our pains come single, make room for one another, and the spring of the mind is fresh and unbroken, its aspect clear and unsullied. Hence "the tear forgot as soon as shed, the sunshine of the breast." But as we advance farther, the will gets greater head. We form violent antipathies and indulge exclusive preferences. We make up our minds to some one thing, and if we cannot have that, will have nothing. We are wedded to opinion, to fancy, to prejudice; which destroys the soundness of our judgments, and the serenity and buoyancy of our feelings. The chain of habit coils itself round the heart, like a serpent, to gnaw and stifle it. It grows rigid and callous; and for the softness and elasticity of childhood, full of proud flesh and obstinate tumours. The violence and perversity of our passions comes in more and more to overlay our natural sensibility



and well-grounded affections; and we screw ourselves up to aim only at those things which are neither desirable nor practicable. Thus life passes away in the feverish irritation of pursuit and the certainty of disappointment. By degrees, nothing but this morbid state of feeling satisfies us : and all common pleasures and cheap amusements are sacrificed to the demon of ambition, avarice, or dissipation. The machine is overwrought : the parching heat of the veins dries up and withers the flowers of Love, Hope, and Joy; and any pause, any release from the rack of ecstasy on which we are stretched, seems more insupportable than the pangs which we endure. We are suspended between tormenting desires and the horrors of *ennui*. The impulse of the will, like the wheels of a carriage going down hill, becomes too strong for the driver, Reason, and cannot be stopped nor kept within bounds. Some idea, some fancy, takes possession of the brain; and however ridiculous, however distressing, however ruinous, haunts us by a sort of fascination through life.

Not only is the principle here pointed out to be seen at work in our more turbulent passions and pursuits; but even in the formal study of arts and sciences the same thing takes place, and undermines the repose and happiness of life. The eagerness of pursuit overcomes the satisfaction to result from the accomplishment. The mind is overstrained to attain its purpose; and when it is attained, the ease and alacrity necessary to enjoy it are gone. The irritation of action does not cease and go down with the occasion for it; but we are first uneasy to get to the end of our work, and then uneasy for want of something to do. The ferment of the brain does not of itself subside into pleasure and soft repose. Hence the disposition to strong *stimuli* observable in persons of much intellectual exertion, to allay and carry off the over-excitement. The *improvisatori* poets (it is recorded by Spence in his Anecdotes of Pope) cannot sleep after an evening's continued display of their singular and difficult art. The rhymes keep running in their heads in spite of themselves, and will not let

them rest. Mechanics and labouring people never know what to do with themselves on a Sunday; though they return to their work with greater spirit for the relief, and look forward to it with pleasure all the week. Sir Joshua Reynolds was never comfortable out of his painting-room, and died of chagria and regret, because he could not paint on to the last moment of his life. He used to say that he could go on retouching a picture forever, as long as it stood on his easel; but as soon as it was once fairly out of the house, he never wished to see it again. An ingenious artist of our own time has been heard to declare, that if ever the Devil got him into his clutches, he would set him to copy his own pictures. Thus the secure, self-complacent retrospect to what is done is nothing; while the anxious, uneasy looking forward to what is to come is every thing. We are afraid to dwell upon the past, lest it should retard our future progress; the indulgence of ease is fatal to excellence; and to succeed in life, we lose the ends of being!

## ESSAY IV.

### ON PEOPLE WITH ONE IDEA.

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THERE are people who have but one idea : at least, if they have more, they keep it a secret, for they never talk but of one subject.

There is Major Cartwright<sup>1</sup> : he has but one idea or subject of discourse, Parliamentary Reform. Now Parliamentary Reform is (as far as I know) a very good thing, a very good idea, and a very good subject to talk about : but why should it be the only one? To hear the worthy and gallant Major resume his favourite topic, is like law-business, or a person who has a suit in Chancery depending. Nothing can be attended to, nothing can be talked of but that. Now it is getting on, now again it is standing still ; at one time the Master has promised to pass judgment by a certain day, at

<sup>1</sup> This most respectable man died lately at a very advanced age.

another he has put it off again and called for more papers, and both are equally reasons for speaking of it. Like the piece of packthread in the barrister's hands, he turns and twists it all ways, and cannot proceed a step without it. Some school-boys cannot read, unless it be in their own book : and the man of one idea cannot converse out of his own subject. Conversation it is not ; but a sort of recital of the preamble of a bill, or a collection of grave arguments for a man's being of opinion with himself. It would be well if there was any thing of character, of eccentricity in all this ; but that is not the case. It is a political homily personified, a walking common-place we have to encounter and listen to. It is just as if a man was to insist on your hearing him go through the fifth chapter of the Book of Judges every time you meet, or like the story of the Cosmogony in the Vicar of Wakefield. It is a tune played on a barrel-organ. It is a common vehicle of discourse into which such persons get and are set down when they please, without any pains or trouble to themselves. Neither is it professional pedantry or trading

Quackery : it has no excuse. The man has no more to do with the question which he saddles on all his hearers than you have. This is what makes the matter hopeless. If a farmer talks to you about his pigs or his poultry, or a physician about his patients, or a lawyer about his briefs, or a merchant about stock, or an author about himself, you know how to account for this ; it is a common infirmity : you have a laugh at his expense, and there is no more to be said. But here is a man who goes out of his way to be absurd, and is troublesome by a romantic effort of generosity. You cannot say to him, “ All this may be interesting to you, but I have no concern in it : ” you cannot put him off in that way. He retorts the Latin adage upon you—*Nihil humani a me alienum puto*. He has got possession of a subject which is of universal and paramount interest (not “ a fee-grief, due to some single breast”)—and on that plea may hold you by the button as long as he chooses. His delight is to harangue on what no-wise regards himself : how then can you refuse to listen to what as little amuses you? Time

and tide wait for no man. The business of the state admits of no delay. The question of Universal Suffrage and Annual Parliaments stands first on the order of the day—takes precedence in its own right of every other question. Any other topic, grave or gay, is looked upon in the light of impertinence, and sent to *Coventry*. Business is an interruption ; pleasure a digression from it. It is the question before every company where the Major comes (which immediately resolves itself into a committee of the whole world upon it) is carried on by means of a perpetual virtual adjournment, and it is presumed that no other is to be entertained while this is pending—a presumption which gives its persevering advocate a fair prospect of expatiating on it to his dying day. As Cicero says of study, it follows him into the country, it stays with him at home ; it sits with him at breakfast, and goes out with him to dinner. It is like a part of his dress, of the costume of his person, without which he would be at a loss what to do. If he meets you in the street, he accosts you with it as a form of salutation : if

you see him at his own house, it is supposed you come upon that. If you happen to remark, "It is a fine day or the town is full," it is considered as a temporary compromise of the question; you are suspected of not going the whole length of the principle. As Sancho when reprimanded for mentioning his homely favourite in the Duke's kitchen, defended himself by saying—"There I thought of Dapple, and there I spoke of him"—so our true stickler for Reform neglects no opportunity of introducing the subject wherever he is. Place its veteran champion under the frozen north, and he will celebrate sweet smiling Reform: place him under the mid-day Afric sun, and he will talk of nothing but Reform—Reform so sweetly smiling and so sweetly promising for the last forty years—

Dulce ridentem Lalagen,  
Dulce loquentem!

A topic of this sort, of which the person himself may be considered as almost sole proprietor and patentee, is an estate for life, free from all incumbrance of wit, thought, or study; you



live upon it as a settled income ; and others might as well think to eject you out of a capital freehold inheritance as think to drive you out of it into the wide world of common sense and argument. Every man's house is his castle ; and every man's common-place is his stronghold, from which he looks out and smiles at the dust and heat of controversy, raised by a number of frivolous and vexatious questions —“ Rings the world with the vain stir !” A cure for this and every other evil would be a Parliamentary Reform ; and so we return in a perpetual circle to the point from which we set out. Is not this a species of sober madness more provoking than the real ? Has not the theoretical enthusiast his mind as much warped, as much enslaved by one idea as the acknowledged lunatic, besides that the former has no lucid intervals ? If you see a visionary of this class going along the street, you can tell as well what he is thinking of and will say next, as the man that fancies himself a tea-pot or the Czar of Muscovy. The one is as inaccessible to reason as the other : if the one raves, the other does !

There are some who fancy the Corn-Bill the root of all evil, and others who trace all the miseries of life to the practice of muffling up children in night-clothes when they sleep or travel. They will declaim by the hour together on the first, and argue themselves black in the face on the last. It is in vain that you give up the point. They persist in the debate, and begin again—"But don't you see—?" These sort of partial obliquities, as they are more entertaining and original, are also by their nature intermittent. They hold a man but for a season. He may have one a year or every two years; and though, while he is in the heat of any new discovery, he will let you hear of nothing else, he varies from himself, and is amusing undesignedly. He is not like the chimes at midnight.

People of the character here spoken of, that is, who tease you to death with some one idea, generally differ in their favourite notion from the rest of the world; and indeed it is the love of distinction which is mostly at the bottom of this peculiarity. Thus one person is remarkable for living on a vegetable diet, and never fails to entertain you all dinner-time with an

invective against animal food. One of this self-denying class, who adds to the primitive simplicity of this sort of food the recommendation of having it in a raw state, lamenting the death of a patient whom he had augured to be in a good way as a convert to his system, at last accounted for his disappointment in a whisper—"But she ate meat privately, depend upon it!" It is not pleasant, though it is what one submits to willingly from some people, to be asked every time you meet, whether you have quite left off drinking wine, and to be complimented or condoled with on your looks according as you answer in the affirmative or negative. Abernethy thinks his pill an infallible cure for all disorders. A person once complaining to his physician that he thought his mode of treatment had not answered, he assured him it was the best in the world,—“and as a proof of it,” says he, “I have had one gentleman, a patient with your disorder, under the same regimen for the last sixteen years!”—I have known persons whose minds were entirely taken up at all times and on all occasions with such questions as the Abolition of the

~~Slave-Trade~~, the Restoration of the Jews, or the progress of Unitarianism. I myself at one period took a pretty strong turn to inveighing against the doctrine of Divine Right, and am not yet cured of my prejudice on that subject. How many projectors have gone mad in good earnest from incessantly harping on one idea, the discovery of the philosopher's stone, the finding out the longitude, or paying off the national debt! The disorder at length comes to a fatal crisis; but long before this, and while they were walking about and talking as usual, the derangement of the fancy, the loss of all voluntary power to control or alienate their ideas from the single subject that occupied them, was gradually taking place, and overturning the fabric of the understanding by wrenching it on one side. Alderman Wood has, I should suppose, talked of nothing but the Queen in all companies for the last six months. Happy Alderman Wood! Some persons have got a definition of the verb, others a system of short-hand, others a cure for typhus fever, others a method for preventing the counterfeiting of bank-notes, which

they think the best possible, and indeed the only one. Others insist there have been only three great men in the world, leaving you to add a fourth. A man who has been in Germany will sometimes talk of nothing but what is German : a Scotchman always leads the discourse to his own country. Some descant on the Kantian philosophy. There is a conceited fellow about town who talks always and every where on this subject. He wears the Categories round his neck like a pearl-chain : he plays off the names of the primary and transcendental qualities, like rings on his fingers. He talks of the Kantian system while he dances; he talks of it while he dines ; he talks of it to his children, to his apprentices, to his customers. He called on me to convince me of it, and said I was only prevented from becoming a complete convert by one or two prejudices. He knows no more about it than a pike-staff. Why then does he make so much ridiculous fuss about it? It is not that he has got this one idea in his head, but that he has got no other. A dunce may talk on the subject of the Kantian philosophy with great im-

punish: if he opened his lips on any other, he might be found out. A French lady, who had married an Englishman who said little, excused him by saying—"He is always thinking of Locke and Newton." This is one way of passing muster by following in the *suite* of great names!—A friend of mine, whom I met one day in the street, accosted me with more than usual vivacity, and said, "Well, we're selling, we're selling!" I thought he meant a house. "No," he said, "haven't you seen the advertisement in the newspapers? I ~~mean~~ mean five-and-twenty copies of the Essay."

This work, a comely, capacious quarto on the most abstruse metaphysics, had occupied his sole thoughts for several years, and he concluded that I must be thinking of what he was. I believe, however, I may say I am nearly the only person that ever read, certainly that ever pretended to understand it. It is an original and most ingenious work, nearly as incomprehensible as it is original, and as quaint as it is ingenious. If the author is taken up with the ideas in his own head and no others, he has a right : for he has ideas there, that are

to be met with nowhere else, and which occasionally would not disgrace a Berkeley. A dextrous plagiarist might get himself an immense reputation by putting them in a popular dress. Oh! how little do they know, who have never done any thing but repeat after others by rote, the pangs, the labour, the yearnings and misgivings of mind it costs, to get at the germ of an original idea—to dig it out of the hidden recesses of thought and nature, and bring it half-ashamed, struggling, and deformed into the day—to give words and intelligible symbols to that which was never imagined or expressed before! It is as if the dumb should speak for the first time, or as if things should stammer out their own meaning, through the imperfect organs of mere sense. I wish that some of our fluent, plausible declaimers, who have such store of words to cover the want of ideas, would lend their art to this writer. If he, “poor, unfledged” in this respect, “who has scarce winged from view o’ th’ nest,” could find a language for his thoughts, truth would find a language for some of her secrets. Mr. Fearn was buried in the woods of Indostan. In his

leisure from business and from tiger-shooting, he took it into his head to look into his own mind. A whim or two, an odd fancy, like a film before the eye, now and then crossed it : it struck him as something curious, but the impression at first disappeared like breath upon glass. He thought no more of it ; yet still the same conscious feelings returned, and what at first was chance or instinct, became a habit. Several notions had taken possession of his brain relating to mental processes which he had never heard alluded to in conversation ; but not being well versed in such matters, he did not know whether they were to be found in learned authors or not. He took a journey to the capital of the Peninsula on purpose, bought Locke, Reid, Stewart, and Berkeley, whom he consulted with eager curiosity when he got home, but did not find what he looked for. He set to work himself ; and in a few weeks, sketched out a rough draught of his thoughts and observations on bamboo paper. The eagerness of his new pursuit, together with the diseases of the climate, proved too much for his constitution, and he was forced to re-



turn to this country. He put his metaphysics, his bamboo manuscript, into the boat with him, and as he floated down the Ganges, said to himself, "If I live, this will live : if I die, it will not be heard of." What is fame to such a feeling? The babbling of an idiot! He brought the work home with him, and twice had it stereotyped. The first sketch he allowed was obscure, but the improved copy he thought could not fail to strike. It did not succeed. The world, as Goldsmith said of himself, made a point of taking no notice of it. Ever since he has had nothing but disappointment and vexation—the greatest and most heart-breaking of all others—that of not being able to make yourself understood. Mr. Fearn tells me there is a sensible writer in the Monthly Review who sees the thing in its proper light, and says so. But I have heard of no other instance. There are notwithstanding ideas in this work, neglected and ill-treated as it has been, that lead to more curious and subtle speculations on some of the most disputed and difficult points of the philosophy of the human mind (such as *relation*, *abstraction*, etc.) than have

been thrown out in any work for the last sixty years, I mean since Hume; for since his time, there has been no metaphysician in this country worth the name. Yet his Treatise on Human Nature, he tells us, "fell still-born from the press." So it is that knowledge works its way, and reputation lingers far behind it. But truth is better than opinion, I maintain it; and as to the two stereotyped and unsold editions of the Essay on Consciousness, I say, *Honi soit qui mal y pense!*<sup>1</sup>—My Uncle Toby had one idea in his head, that of his bowling-green, and another, that of the Widow Wadman. Oh, spare them both! I will only add one more anecdote in illustration of this theory of the mind's being occupied with one idea, which is most frequently of a man's self. A celebrated lyrical writer happened to drop into a small party where they had just got the novel of Rob Roy, by the author of Waverley.

<sup>1</sup> Quanto poetry, as well as quanto metaphysics, does not always sell. Going one day into a shop in Paternoster-row to see for some lines in Mr. Wordsworth's Excursion to interlard some prose with, I applied to the constituted authorities, and asked if I could look at a copy of the Excursion? The answer was—"Into which county, Sir?"

The motto in the title-page was taken from a poem of his. This was a hint sufficient, a word to the wise. He instantly went to the book-shelf in the next room, took down the volume of his own poems, read the whole of that in question aloud with manifest complacency, replaced it on the shelf, and walked away; taking no more notice of Rob Roy than if there had been no such person, nor of the new novel than if it had not been written by its renowned author. There was no reciprocity in this. But the writer in question does not admit of any merit, second to his own.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Owen is a man remarkable for one

<sup>1</sup> These fantastic poets are like a foolish ringer at Plymouth that Northcote tells the story of. He was proud of his ringing, and the boys who made a jest of his foible used to get him into the belfry, and ask him, "Well now, John, how many good ringers are there in Plymouth?" "Two," he would say, without any hesitation. "Ay, indeed! and who are they?"—"Why, first, there's myself, that's one; and—and"——"Well, and who's the other?"—"Why, there's, there's—Ecod, I can't think of any other but myself" *Talk we of one Master Launcelot*. The story is of ringers: it will do for any vain, shallow, self-satisfied egotist of them all.

idea. It is that of himself and the Lanark cotton-mills. He carries this idea backwards and forwards with him from Glasgow to London, without allowing any thing for attrition, and expects to find it in the same state of purity and perfection in the latter place as at the former. He acquires a wonderful velocity and impenetrability in his undaunted transit. Resistance to him is vain, while the whirling motion of the mail-coach remains in his head.

"Not Alps nor Apennines can keep him out,  
Nor fortified redoubt."

He even got possession, in the suddenness of his onset, of the steam-engine of the Times Newspaper, and struck off ten thousand woodcuts of the Projected Villages, which afforded an ocular demonstration to all who saw them of the practicability of Mr. Owen's whole scheme. He comes into a room with one of these documents in his hand, with the air of a schoolmaster and a quack-doctor mixed, asks very kindly how you do, and on hearing you are still in an indifferent state of health owing to bad digestion, instantly turns round,

and observes, "That all that will be remedied in his plan : that indeed he thinks too much attention has been paid to the mind, and not enough to the body ; that in his system, which he has now perfected and which will shortly be generally adopted, he has provided effectually for both : that he has been long of opinion that the mind depends altogether on the physical organisation, and where the latter is neglected or disordered, the former must languish and want its due vigour : that exercise is therefore a part of his system, with full liberty to develop every faculty of mind and body : that two objections had been made to his New View of Society, *viz.* its want of relaxation from labour, and its want of variety ; but the first of these, the too great restraint, he trusted he had already answered, for where the powers of mind and body were freely exercised and brought out, surely liberty must be allowed to exist in the highest degree ; and as to the second, the monotony which would be produced by a regular and general plan of co-operation, he conceived he had proved in his " New View " and " Addresses

to the higher Classes; ” that the co-operation he had recommended was necessarily conducive to the most extensive improvement of the ideas and faculties, and where this was the case, there must be the greatest possible variety, instead of a want of it.” And having said so, this expert and sweeping orator takes up his hat and walks down stairs after reading his lecture of truisms like a play-bill or an apothecary’s advertisement; and should you stop him at the door to say by way of putting in a word in common, that Mr. Southey seems somewhat favourable to his plan in his late “Letter to Mr. William Smith,” he looks at you with a smile of pity at the futility of all opposition and the idleness of all encouragement. People who thus swell out some vapid scheme of their own into undue importance, seem to me to labour under water in the head—to exhibit a huge hydrocephalus! They may be very worthy people for all that, but they are bad companions and very indifferent reasoners. Tom Moore says of some one somewhere, “That he puts his hand in his breeches’ pocket like a crocodile.” The

phrase is hieroglyphical : but Mr. Owen and others might be said to put their foot in the question of social improvement and reform much in the same unaccountable manner.

I hate to be surfeited with any thing, however sweet. I do not want to be always tied to the same question, as if there were no other in the world. I like a mind more Catholic.

“I love to talk with mariners,  
That come from a far countree.”

I am not for a collusion” but “an ~~an~~ exchange” of ideas. It is well to hear what other people have to say on a number of subjects. I do not wish to be always respiring the same confined atmosphere, but to vary the scene, and get a little relief and fresh air out of doors. Do all we can to shake it off, there is always enough pedantry, egotism, and self-conceit left lurking behind : we need not seal ourselves up hermetically in these precious qualities ; so as to think of nothing but our own wonderful discoveries, and hear nothing but the sound of our own voice.

Scholars, like princes, may learn something by being *incognito*. Yet we see those who cannot go into a bookseller's shop, or bear to be five minutes in a stage-coach, without letting you know who they are. They carry their reputation about with them as the snail does its shell, and sit under its canopy like the lady in the lobster. I cannot understand this at all. What is the use of a man's always revolving round his own little circle? He must, one should think, be tired of it himself, as well as tire other people. A well-known writer says with much boldness both in the thought and expression, that "a Lord is imprisoned in the Bastille of a *name*, and cannot enlarge himself into man:" and I have known men of genius in the same predicament. Why must a man be forever mouthing out his own poetry, comparing himself with Milton, passage by passage, and weighing every line in a balance of posthumous fame which he holds in his own hands? It argues a want of imagination as well as of common sense. Has he no ideas but what he has put into verse; or none in common with his hearers? Why



should he think it the only scholar-like thing, the only “virtue extant” to see the merit of his writings, and that “men were brutes without them?” Why should he bear a grudge to all art, to all beauty, to all wisdom that does not spring from his own brain? Or why should he fondly imagine that there is but one fine thing in the world, namely poetry, and that he is the only poet in it? It will never do. Poetry is a very fine thing; but there are other things besides it. Every thing must have its turn. Does a wise man think to enlarge his comprehension by turning his eyes only on himself, or hope to conciliate the admiration of others by scouting, proscribing, and loathing all that they delight in? He must either have a disproportionate idea of himself; or be ignorant of the world, in which he lives. It is quite enough to have one class of people born to think the universe made for them!—It seems also to argue a want of repose, of confidence, and firm faith in a man’s real pretensions to be always dragging them forward into the fore-ground, as if the proverb held here—*Out of sight out of mind*. Does the author

in question conceive that no one would ever think of his poetry, unless he forced it upon them by repeating it himself? Does he believe all competition, all allowance of another's merit fatal to him? Must he, like Moody in the Country Girl, lock up the faculties of his admirers in ignorance of all other fine things, painting, music, the antique, lest they should play truant to him? Methinks, such a proceeding implies no good opinion of his own genius or their taste :—it is deficient in dignity and in decorum. Surely if any one is convinced of the reality of an acquisition, he can bear not to have it spoken of every minute. If he knows he has an undoubted superiority in any respect, he will not be uneasy because every one he meets is not in the secret, nor be staggered by the report of rival excellence. One of the first mathematicians and classical scholars of the day was mentioning it as a compliment to himself that a cousin of his, a girl from school, had said of him —“ You know M—— is a very plain good sort of young man, but he is not any thing at all out of the common.” L. H. once said to me—

“ I wonder I never heard you speak upon this subject before, which you seem to have studied a good deal.” I answered, “ Why, we were not reduced to that, that I know of ! ” —

There are persons, who without being chargeable with the vice here spoken of, yet “ stand accountant for as great a sin : ” though not dull and monotonous, they are vivacious mannerists in their conversation, and excessive egotists. Though they run over a thousand subjects in mere gaiety of heart, their delight still flows from one idea, namely, themselves. Open the book in what page you will, there is a frontispiece of themselves staring you in the face. They are a sort of *Jacks o’ the Green*, with a sprig of laurel, a little tinsel, and a little smut, but still playing antics and keeping in incessan motion, to attract attention and extort your pittance of approbation. Whether they talk of the town or the country, poetry or politics, it comes to much the same thing. If they talk to you of the town. its diversions, “ its palaces, its ladies, and its pomp,” they are the delight, the grace, and ornament of it. If they are de-

scribing the charms of the country, they give no account of any individual spot or object, or source of pleasure but the circumstance of their being there. “ With them conversing, we forget all place, all seasons, and their change.” They perhaps pluck a leaf or a flower, patronise it, and hand it you to admire, but select no one feature of beauty or grandeur to dispute the palm of perfection with their own persons. Their rural descriptions are mere landscape back-grounds, with their own portraits in an engaging attitude in front. They are not observing or enjoying the scene, but doing the honours as masters of the ceremonies to nature, and arbiters of elegance to all humanity. If they tell a love-tale of enamoured princesses, it is plain they fancy themselves the hero of the piece. If they discuss poetry, their encomiums still turn on something genial and unsophisticated, meaning their own style : if they enter into politics, it is understood that a hint from them to the potentates of Europe is sufficient. In short, as a lover (talk of what you will) brings in his mistress at every turn, so these persons

contrive to divert your attention to the same darling object—they are, in fact, in love with themselves ; and, like lovers, should be left to keep their own company.

## ESSAY V.

### ON THE IGNORANCE OF THE LEARNED.

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- “ For the more languages a man can speak,  
His talent has but sprung the greater leak :  
And, for the industry he has spent upon’t,  
Must full as much some other way discount.  
The Hebrew, Chaldee, and the Syriac,  
• Do, like their letters, set men’s reason back,  
And turn their wits that strive to understand it  
(Like those that write the characters) left-handed.  
Yet he that is but able to express  
No sense at all in several languages,  
Will pass for learned than he that’s known  
To speak the strongest reason in his own.”,

THE AUTHOR OF HUDIBRAS.

THE description of persons who have the fewest ideas of all others are mere authors and readers. It is better to be able neither to read nor write than to be able to do nothing else. A loungee who is ordinarily seen with a book in his hand, is (we may be almost sure) equally

without the power or inclination to attend either to what passes around him, or in his own mind. Such a one may be said to carry his understanding about with him in his pocket, or to leave it at home on his library shelves. He is afraid of venturing on any train of reasoning, or of striking out any observation that is not mechanically suggested to him by passing his eyes over certain legible characters; shrinks from the fatigue of thought, which, for want of practice, becomes insupportable to him; and sits down contented with an endless wearisome succession of words and half-formed images, which fill the void of the mind, and continually efface one another. Learning is, in too many cases, but a foil to common sense; a substitute for true knowledge. Books are less often made use of as “spectacles” to look at nature with, than as blinds to keep out its strong light and shifting scenery from weak eyes and indolent dispositions. The book-worm wraps himself up in his web of verbal generalities, and sees only the glimmering shadows of things reflected from the minds of others. Nature *puts him*

*out.* The impressions of real objects, stripped of the disguises of words and voluminous round-about descriptions, are blows that stagger him ; their variety distracts, their rapidity exhausts him ; and he turns from the bustle, the noise and glare and whirling motion of the world about him (which he has not an eye to follow in its fantastic changes, nor an understanding to reduce to fixed principles) to the quiet monotony of the dead languages, and the less startling and more intelligible combinations of the letters of the alphabet. It is well, it is perfectly well. “Leave me to my repose” is the motto of the sleeping and the dead. You might as well ask the paralytic to leap from his chair and throw away his crutch, or, without a miracle, to “take up his bed and walk,” as expect the learned reader to lay down his book and think for himself. He clings to it for his intellectual support ; and his dread of being left to himself is like the horror of a vacuum. He can only breathe a learned atmosphere, as other men breathe common air. He is a borrower of sense. He has no ideas of his own, and must live on those



of other people. The habit of supplying our ideas from foreign sources “enfeebles all internal strength of thought,” as a course of dram-drinking destroys the tone of the stomach. The faculties of the mind, when not exerted, or when cramped by custom and authority, become listless, torpid, and unfit for the purposes of thought or action. Can we wonder at the languor and lassitude which is thus produced by a life of learned sloth and ignorance; by poring over lines and syllables that excite little more idea or interest than if they were the characters of an unknown tongue, till the eye closes on vacancy, and the book drops from the feeble hand! I would rather be a wood-cutter, or the meanest hind, that all day “sweats in the eye of Phœbus, and at night sleeps in Elysium,” than wear out my life so, ’twixt dreaming and awake. The learned author differs from the learned student in this, that the one transcribes what the other reads. The learned are mere literary drudges. If you set them upon original composition, their heads turn, they know not where they are. The indefatigable readers of books are like

the everlasting copiers of pictures, who, when they attempt to do any thing of their own, find they want an eye quick enough, a hand steady enough, and colours bright enough, to trace the living forms of nature.

Any one who has passed through the regular gradations of a classical education, and is not made a fool by it, may consider himself as having had a very narrow escape. It is an old remark, that boys who shine at school do not make the greatest figure when they grow up and come out into the world. The things, in fact, which a boy is set to learn at school, and on which his success depends, are things which do not require the exercise either of the highest or the most useful faculties of the mind. Memory (and that of the lowest kind) is the chief faculty called into play, in conning over and repeating lessons by rote in grammar, in languages, in geography, arithmetic, etc. so that he who has the most of this technical memory, with the least turn for other things, which have a stronger and more natural claim upon his childish attention, will make the most forward school-boy. The jargon con-

taining the definitions of the parts of speech, the rules for casting up an account, or the inflections of a Greek verb, can have no attraction to the tyro of ten years old, except as they are imposed as a task upon him by others, or from his feeling the want of sufficient relish or amusement in other things. A lad with a sickly constitution, and no very active mind, who can just retain what is pointed out to him, and has neither sagacity to distinguish nor spirit to enjoy for himself, will generally be at the head of his form. An idler at school, on the other hand, is one who has high health and spirits, who has the free use of his limbs, with all his wits about him, who feels the circulation of his blood and the motion of his heart, who is ready to laugh and cry in a breath, and who had rather chase a ball or a butterfly, feel the open air in his face, look at the fields or the sky, follow a winding path, or enter with eagerness into all the little conflicts and interests of his acquaintances and friends, than doze over a musty spelling-book, repeat barbarous distichs after his master, sit so many hours pinioned to a writing-desk, and receive

his reward for the loss of time and pleasure in paltry prize-medals at Christmas and Midsummer. There is indeed a degree of stupidity which prevents children from learning the usual lessons, or ever arriving at these puny academic honours. But what passes for stupidity is much oftener a want of interest, of a sufficient motive to fix the attention, and force a reluctant application to the dry and unmeaning pursuits of school-learning. The best capacities are as much above this drudgery, as the dullest are beneath it. Our men of the greatest genius have not been most distinguished for their acquirements at school or at the university.

“Th’ enthusiast Fancy was a truant ever.”

Gray and Collins were among the instances of this wayward disposition. Such persons do not think so highly of the advantages, nor can they submit their imaginations so servilely to the trammels of strict scholastic discipline. There is a certain kind and degree of intellect in which words take root, but into which things have not power to penetrate. A mediocrity of

talent, with a certain slenderness of moral constitution, is the soil that produces the most brilliant specimens of successful prize-essayists and Greek epigrammatists. It should not be forgotten, that the most equivocal character among modern politicians was the cleverest boy at Eton. "a

Learning is the knowledge of that which is not generally known to others, and which we can only derive at second-hand from books or other artificial sources. The knowledge of that which is before us or about us, which appeals to our experience, passions, and pursuits, to the bosoms and businesses of men, is not learning. Learning is the knowledge of that which none but the learned know. He is the most learned man who knows the most of what is farthest removed from common life and actual observation, that is of the least practical utility, and least liable to be brought to the test of experience, and that, having been handed down through the greatest number of intermediate stages, is the most full of uncertainty, difficulties, and contradictions. It is seeing with the eyes of others, hearing with their ears, and

pinning our faith on their understandings. The learned man prides himself in the knowledge of names and dates, not of men or things. He thinks and cares nothing about his next-door neighbours, but he is deeply read in the tribes and casts of the Hindoos and Calmuc Tartars. He can hardly find his way into the next street, though he is acquainted with the exact dimensions of Constantinople and Peking. He does not know whether his oldest acquaintance is a knave or a fool, but he can pronounce a pompous lecture on all the principal characters in history. He cannot tell whether an object is black or white, round or square, and yet he is a professed master of the laws of optics and the rules of perspective. He knows as much of what he talks about, as a blind man does of colours. He cannot give a satisfactory answer to the plainest question, nor is he ever in the right in any one of his opinions, upon any one matter of fact that really comes before him, and yet he gives himself out for an infallible judge on all those points, of which it is impossible that he or any other person living should know any thing but by conjecture. He

is expert in all the dead and in most of the living languages ; but he can neither speak his own fluently, nor write it correctly. A person of this class, the second Greek scholar of his day, undertook to point out several solecisms in Milton's Latin style ; and in his own performance there is hardly a sentence of common English. Such was Dr.—. Such is Dr.—. Such was not Porson. He was an exception that confirmed the general rule,—a man that, by uniting talents and knowledge with learning, made the distinction between them more striking and palpable.

A mere scholar, who knows nothing but books, must be ignorant even of them. " Books do not teach the use of books." How should he know any thing of a work, who knows nothing of the subject of it ? The learned pedant is conversant with books only as they are made of other books, and those again of others, without end. He parrots those who have parroted others. He can translate the same word into ten different languages, but he knows nothing of the *thing* which it means in any one of them. He stuffs

his head with authorities built on authorities, with quotations quoted from quotations, while he locks up his senses, his understanding, and his heart. He is unacquainted with the maxims and manners of the world; he is to seek in the characters of individuals. He sees no beauty in the face of nature or of art. To him “the mighty world of eye and ear” is hid; and “knowledge,” except at one entrance, “quite shut out.” His pride takes part with his ignorance; and his self-importance rises with the number of things of which he does not know the value, and which he therefore despises as unworthy of his notice. He knows nothing of pictures; —“of the colouring of Titian, the grace of Raphael, the purity of Domenichino, the *corregiescity* of Correggio, the learning of Poussin, the airs of Guido, the taste of the Caracci, or the grand contour of Michael Angelo,” — of all those glories of the Italian and miracles of the Flemish school, which have filled the eyes of mankind with delight, and to the study and imitation of which thousands have in vain devoted their lives. These are to him as if



they had never been, a mere dead letter, a by-word; and no wonder: for he neither sees nor understands their prototypes in nature. A print of Rubens's *Watering-place*, or Claude's *Enchanted Castle* may be hanging on the walls of his room for months without his once perceiving them; and if you point them out to him, he will turn away from them. The language of nature or of art (which is another nature) is one that he does not understand. He repeats indeed the names of Apelles and Phidias, because they are to be found in classic authors, and boasts of their works as prodigies, because they no longer exist; or when he sees the finest remains of Grecian art actually before him in the Elgin Marbles, takes no other interest in them than as they lead to a learned dispute, and (which is the same thing) a quarrel about the meaning of a Greek particle. He is equally ignorant of music; he "knows no touch of it," from the strains of the all-accomplished Mozart to the shepherd's pipe upon the mountain. His ears are nailed to his books; and deadened with the sound of the Greek and

Latin tongues, and the din and smithery of school-learning. Does he know any thing more of poetry? He knows the number of feet in a verse, and of acts in a play; but of the soul or spirit he knows nothing. He can turn a Greek ode into English, or a Latin epigram into Greek verse, but whether either is worth the trouble, he leaves to the critics. Does he understand “the act and practice part of life” better than “the theoretic?” No. He knows no liberal or mechanic art; no trade or occupation; no game of skill or chance. Learning “has no skill in surgery,” in agriculture, in building, in working in wood or in iron; it cannot make any instrument of labour, or use it when made; it cannot handle the plough or the spade, or the chisel or the hammer; it knows nothing of hunting or hawking, fishing or shooting, of horses or dogs, of fencing or dancing, or cudgel-playing, or bowls, or cards, or tennis, or any thing else. The learned professor of all arts and sciences cannot reduce any one of them to practice, though he may contribute an account of them to an Encyclopædia. He has

not the use of his hands or of his feet ; he can neither run, nor walk, nor swim ; and he considers all those who actually understand and can exercise any of these arts of body or mind, as vulgar and mechanical men ;—though to know almost any one of them in perfection requires long time and practice, with powers originally fitted, and a turn of mind particularly devoted to them. It does not require more than this to enable the learned candidate to arrive, by painful study, at a Doctor's degree and a fellowship, and to eat, drink, and sleep the rest of his life !

The thing is plain. All that men really understand, is confined to a very small compass ; to their daily affairs and experience ; to what they have an opportunity to know, and motives to study or practise. The rest is affectation and imposture. The common people have the use of their limbs ; for they live by their labour or skill. They understand their own business, and the characters of those they have to deal with ; for it is necessary that they should. They have eloquence to express their passions, and wit at will to express their

contempt and provoke laughter. Their natural use of speech is not hung up in monumental mockery, in an obsolete language; nor is their sense of what is ludicrous, or readiness at finding out allusions to express it, buried in collections of *Anas*. You will hear more good things on the outside of a stage-coach from London to Oxford, than if you were to pass a twelvemonth with the Undergraduates or Heads of Colleges of that famous university; and more *home* truths are to be learnt from listening to a noisy debate in an alehouse, than from attending to a formal one in the House of Commons. An elderly country gentlewoman will often know more of character, and be able to illustrate it by more amusing anecdotes taken from the history of what has been said, done, and gossiped in a country town for the last fifty years, than the best blue-stocking of the age will be able to glean from that sort of learning which consists in an acquaintance with all the novels and satirical poems published in the same period. People in towns, indeed, are woefully deficient in a knowledge of cha-

racter, which they see only *in the bust*, not as a whole-length. People in the country not only know all that has happened to a man, but trace his virtues or vices, as they do his features, in their descent through several generations, and solve some contradiction in his behaviour by a cross in the breed, half a century ago. The learned know nothing of the matter, either in town or country. Above all, the mass of society have common sense, which the learned in all ages want. The vulgar are in the right when they judge for themselves; they are wrong when they trust to their blind guides. The celebrated non-conformist divine, Baxter, was almost stoned to death by the good women of Kidderminster, for asserting from the pulpit that "hell was paved with infants' skulls;" but by the force of argument, and of learned quotations from the Fathers, the reverend preacher at length prevailed over the scruples of his congregation, and over reason and humanity.

Such is the use which has been made of human learning. The labourers in this vine-

yard seem as if it was their object to confound all common sense, and the distinctions of good and evil, by means of traditional maxims and preconceived notions, taken upon trust, and increasing in absurdity with increase of age. They pile hypothesis on hypothesis, mountain-high, till it is impossible to come at the plain truth on any question. They see things, not as they are, but as they find them in books; and “wink and shut their apprehensions up,” in order that they may discover nothing to interfere with their prejudices, or convince them of their absurdity. It might be supposed, that the height of human wisdom consisted in maintaining contradictions, and rendering nonsense sacred. There is no dogma, however fierce or foolish, to which these persons have not set their seals, and tried to impose on the understandings of their followers, as the will of Heaven, clothed with all the terrors and sanctions of religion. How little has the human understanding been directed to find out the true and useful! How much ingenuity has been thrown away in the defence of

creeds and systems! How much time and talents have been wasted in theological controversy, in law, in politics, in verbal criticism, in judicial astrology, and in finding out the art of making gold! What actual benefit do we reap from the writings of a Laud or a Whitgift, or of Bishop Bull or Bishop Waterland, or Pridcaux' Connections, or Beausobre, or Calmet, or St. Augustine, or Puffendorf, or Vattel, or from the more literal but equally learned and unprofitable labours of Scaliger, Cardan, and Scioppius? How many grains of sense are there in their thousand folio or quarto volumes? What would the world lose, if they were committed to the flames to-morrow? Or are they not already "gone to the vault of all the Capulets?" Yet all these were oracles in their time, and would have scoffed at you or me, at common sense and human nature, for differing with them. It is our turn to laugh now.

To conclude this subject. The most sensible people to be met with in society are men of business and of the world, who argue from what they see and know, instead of spinning

cobweb distinctions of what things ought to be. Women have often more of what is called *good sense* than men. They have fewer pretensions; are less implicated in theories; and judge of objects more from their immediate and involuntary impression on the mind, and, therefore, more truly and naturally. They cannot reason wrong; for they do not reason at all. They do not think or speak by rule; and they have in general more eloquence and wit, as well as sense, on that account. By their wit, sense, and eloquence together, they generally contrive to govern their husbands. Their style, when they write to their friends (not for the booksellers) is better than that of most authors.—Uneducated people have most exuberance of invention, and the greatest freedom from prejudice. Shakespear's was evidently an uneducated mind, both in the freshness of his imagination, and in the variety of his views; as Milton's was scholastic, in the texture both of his thoughts and feelings. Shakespear had not been accustomed to write themes at school in favour of virtue or against vice.



To this we owe the unaffected, but healthy tone of his dramatic morality. If we wish to know the force of human genius, we should read Shakespear. If we wish to see the insignificance of human learning, we may study his commentators.

## ESSAY VI.

### ON WILL-MAKING.

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FEW things shew the human character in a more ridiculous light than the circumstance of will-making. It is the latest opportunity we have of exercising the natural perversity of the disposition, and we take care to make a good use of it. We husband it with jealousy; put it off as long as we can; and then employ every precaution that the world shall be no gainer by our deaths. This last act of our lives seldom belies the former tenor of them, for stupidity, caprice, and unmeaning spite. All that we seem to think of is to manage matters so (in settling accounts with those who are unmannerly enough to survive us) as to do as little good, and to plague and disappoint as many people as possible.

Some persons have a superstition on the

subject of making their last will and testament, and think that when every thing is ready signed and sealed, there is nothing further left to delay their departure. I have heard of an instance of one person who having a feeling of this kind on his mind, and being teased into making his will by those about him, actually fell ill with pure apprehension, and thought he was going to die in good earnest, but having executed the deed over-night, awoke, to his great surprise, the next morning, and found himself as well as ever he was.' An elderly gentleman possessed of a good estate and the same idle notion, and who found himself in a

' A poor woman at Plymouth who did not like the formality, or could not afford the expense of a will, thought to leave what little property she had in wearing-apparel and household moveables to her friends and relations, *viva voce*, and before Death stopped her breath. She gave and willed away (of her proper authority) her chair and table to one, her bed to another, an old cloak to a third, a night-cap and petticoat to a fourth, and so on. The old crones sat weeping round, and soon after carried off all they could lay their hands upon, and left their benefactress to her fate. They were no sooner gone than she unexpectedly recovered, and sent to have her things back again; but not one of them could she get, and she was left without a rag to her back, or a friend to console with her.

dangerous way, was anxious to do this piece of justice to those who remained behind him, but when it came to the point, his heart failed him, and his nervous fancies returned in full force :—even on his death-bed, he still held back and was averse to sign what he looked upon as his own death-warrant, and just at the last gasp, amidst the anxious looks and silent upbraidings of friends and relatives that surrounded him, he summoned resolution to hold out his feeble hand which was guided by others to trace his name, and he fell back—a corpse ! If there is any pressing reason for it, that is, if any particular person would be relieved from a state of harassing uncertainty, or materially benefited by their making a will, the old and infirm (who do not like to be put out of their way) generally make this an excuse to themselves for putting it off to the very last moment, probably till it is too late : or where this is sure to make the greatest number of blank faces, contrive to give their friends the slip, without signifying their final determination in their favour. Where some unfortunate individual has been kept long in suspense, who

has been perhaps sought out for that very purpose, and who may be in a great measure dependent on this as a last resource, it is nearly a certainty that there will be no will to be found ; no trace, no sign to discover whether the person dying thus intestate ever had any intention of the sort, or why they relinquished it. This is to bespeak the thoughts and imaginations of others for victims after we are dead, as well as their persons and expectations for hangers-on while we are living. A celebrated beauty of the middle of the last century, towards its close sought out a female relative, the friend and companion of her youth, who had lived during the forty years of their separation in rather straitened circumstances, and in a situation which admitted of some alleviations. Twice they met after that long lapse of time—once her relation visited her in the splendour of a rich old family-mansion, and once she crossed the country to become an inmate of the humble dwelling of her early and only remaining friend. What was this for? Was it to revive the image of her youth in the pale and care-worn face of her friend?

Or was it to display the decay of her charms and recal her long-forgotten triumphs to the memory of the only person who could bear witness to them? Was it to show the proud remains of herself to those who remembered or had often heard what she was—her skin like shrivelled alabaster, her emaciated features chiseled by nature's finest hand, her eyes that when a smile lighted them up, still shone like diamonds, the vermilion hues that still bloomed among wrinkles? Was it to talk of bone-lace, of the flounces and brocades of the last century, of race-balls in the year 1762, and of the scores of lovers that had died at her feet, and to set whole counties in a flame again, only, with a dream of faded beauty? Whether it was for this, or whether she meant to leave her friend any thing (as was indeed expected, all things considered, not without reason) nobody knows—for she never breathed a syllable on the subject herself, and died without a will. The accomplished coquet of twenty, who had pampered hopes only to kill them, who had kindled rapture with a look and extinguished it with a breath, could find no better employ-

ment at seventy than to revive the fond recollections and raise up the drooping hopes of her kinswoman, only to let them fall—to rise no more. Such is the delight we have in trifling with and tantalising the feelings of others by the exquisite refinements, the studied sleights of love or friendship!

When a property is actually bequeathed, supposing the circumstances of the case and the usages of society to leave a practical discretion to the testator, it is most frequently in such portions as can be of the least service. Where there is much already, much is given; where much is wanted, little or nothing. Poverty invites a sort of pity, a miserable dole of assistance; necessity is dismissed with neglect and scorn; wealth attracts and allures to itself more wealth, by natural association of ideas, or by that innate love of inequality and injustice, which is the favourite principle of the imagination. Men like to collect money into large heaps in their life-time: they like to leave it in large heaps after they are dead. They grasp it into their own hands, not to use it for their own good, but to hoard,

to lock it up, to make an object, an idol, and a wonder of it. Do you expect them to distribute it so as to do others good; that they will like those who come after them better than themselves; that if they were willing to pinch and starve themselves, they will not deliberately defraud their sworn friends and nearest kindred of what would be of the utmost use to them? No, they will thrust their heaps of gold and silver into the hands of others (as their proxies) to keep for them untouched, still increasing, still of no use to any one, but to pamper pride and avarice, to glitter in the huge, watchful, insatiable eye of fancy, to be deposited as a new offering at the shrine of Mammon, their God—this is with them to put it to its intelligible and proper use, this is fulfilling a sacred, indispensable duty, this cheers them in the solitude of the grave, and throws a gleam of satisfaction across the stony eye of death. But to think of frittering it down, of sinking it in charity, of throwing it away on the idle claims of humanity, where it would no longer peer in monumental pomp over their heads; and that too when on the point of death



themselves, *in articulo mortis*, oh! it would be madness, waste, extravagance, impiety!—Thus worldlings feel and argue without knowing it; and while they fancy they are studying their own interest or that of some booby successor, their *alter idem*, are but the dupes and puppets of a favourite idea, a phantem, a prejudice, that must be kept up somewhere (no matter where) if it still plays before and haunts their imagination while they have sense or understanding left—to cling to their darling follies.

There was a remarkable instance of this tendency *to the heap*, this desire to cultivate an abstract passion for wealth, in a will of one of the Thellusons some time back. This will went to keep the greater part of a large property from the use of the natural heirs and next-of-kin for a length of time, and to let it accumulate at compound interest in such a way and so long, that it would at last mount up in value to the purchase-money of a whole county. The interest accruing from the funded property or the rent of the lands a certain periods was to be employed to pur-

chase other estates, other parks and manors in the neighbourhood or farther off, so that the prospect of the future demesne that was to devolve at some distant time to the unborn lord of acres, swelled and enlarged itself, like a sea, circle without circle, vista beyond vista, till the imagination was staggered, and the mind exhausted. Now here was a scheme for the accumulation of wealth and for laying the foundation of family-aggrandisement purely imaginary, romantic—one might almost say, disinterested. The vagueness, the magnitude, the remoteness of the object, the resolute sacrifice of all immediate and gross advantages, clothe it with the privileges of an abstract idea, so that the project has the air of a fiction or of a story in a novel. It was an instance of what might be called posthumous avarice, like the love of posthumous fame. It had little more to do with selfishness than if the testator had appropriated the same sums in the same way to build a pyramid, to construct an aqueduct, to endow an hospital, or effect any other patriotic or merely fantastic purpose. He wished to heap up a pile of wealth

(millions of acres) in the dim horizon of future years, that could be of no use to him or to those with whom he was connected by positive and personal ties, but as a crotchet of the brain, a gew-gaw of the fancy.<sup>1</sup> Yet to enable himself to put this scheme in execution, he had perhaps toiled and watched, all his life, denied himself rest, food, pleasure, liberty, society, and persevered with the patience and self-denial of a martyr. I have insisted on this point the more, to shew how much of the imaginary and speculative there is interfused even in those passions and purposes which have not the good of others for their object, and how little reason this honest citizen and builder of castles in the air would have had to treat those who devoted themselves to the pursuit of fame, to obloquy and persecution for the sake of truth and liberty, or who sacrificed their lives for their country in a just cause, as visionaries and enthusiasts, who did not understand what was properly

<sup>1</sup> The law of primogeniture has its origin in the principle here stated, the desire of perpetuating some one palpable and prominent proof of wealth and power.

due to their own interest and the securing of the *main-chance*. Man is not the creature of sense and selfishness, even in those pursuits which grow up out of that origin, so much as of imagination, custom, passion, whim, and humour.

I have heard of a singular instance of a will made by a person who was addicted to a habit of lying. He was so notorious for this propensity (not out of spite or cunning, but as a gratuitous exercise of invention) that from a child no one could ever believe a syllable he uttered. From the want of any dependence to be placed on him, he became the jest and by-word of the school where he was brought up. The last act of his life did not disgrace him. For having gone abroad, and falling into a dangerous decline, he was advised to return home. He paid all that he was worth for his passage, went on ship-board, and employed the few remaining days he had to live in making and executing his will; in which he bequeathed large estates in different parts of England, money in the funds, rich jewels, rings, and all kinds of

valuables to his old friends and acquaintance, who not knowing how far the force of nature could go, were not for some time convinced that all this fairy wealth had never had an existence any where but in the idle coinage of his brain, whose whims and projects were no more!—The extreme keeping in this character is only to be accounted for by supposing such an original constitutional levity as made truth entirely indifferent to him, and the serious importance attached to it by others an object of perpetual sport and ridicule!

The art of will-making chiefly consists in baffling the importunity of expectation. I do not so much find fault with this when it is done as a punishment and oblique satire on servility and selfishness. It is in that case *Diamond cut Diamond*—a trial of skill between the legacy-hunter and the legacy-maker, which shall fool the other. The cringing toad-eater, the officious tale-bearer is perhaps well paid for years of obsequious attendance with a bare mention and a mourning-ring; nor can I think that Gil Blas' library was not quite as much as the coxcombr of his

pretensions deserved. There are some admirable scenes in Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, shewing the humours of a legacy-hunter, and the different ways of putting him off with excuses and assurances of not being forgotten. Yet it is hardly right, after all, to encourage this kind of pitiful, bare-faced intercourse without meaning to pay for it; as the coquet has no right to jilt the lovers she has trifled with. Flattery and submission are marketable commodities like any other, have their price, and ought scarcely to be obtained under false pretences. If we see through and despise the wretched creature that attempts to impose on our credulity, we can at any time dispense with his services: if we are soothed by this mockery of respect and friendship, why not indemnify him like any other drudge, or as we satisfy the actor who performs a part in a play by our particular desire? But often these premeditated disappointments are as unjust as they are cruel, and are marked with circumstances of indignity, in proportion to the worth of the object. The suspecting, the taking it for granted that your name is

down in a will, is sufficient provocation to have it struck out : the hinting at an obligation, the consciousness of it on the part of the testator, will make him determined to avoid the formal acknowledgment of it, at any expense. The disinheriting of relations is mostly for venial offences, not for base actions : we punish out of pique, to revenge some instance in which we have been disappointed of our wills, some act of disobedience to what had no reasonable ground to go upon : and we are obstinate in adhering to our resolution, as it was sudden and rash, and doubly bent on asserting our authority in what we have least right to interfere in. It is the wound inflicted upon our self-love, not the stain upon the character of the thoughtless offender, that calls for condign punishment. Crimes, vices may go unchecked, or unnoticed : but it is the laughing at our weaknesses, or thwarting our humours, that is never to be forgotten. It is not the errors of others, but our own miscalculations, on which we wreak our lasting vengeance. It is ourselves that we cannot forgive. In the will of Nicholas

Gimcrack, the virtuoso recorded in the Tatler, we learn, among other items, that his eldest son is cut off with a single cockle-shell for his undutiful behaviour in laughing at his little sister whom his father kept preserved in spirits of wine. Another of his relations has a collection of grasshoppers bequeathed him, as in the testator's opinion an adequate reward and acknowledgment due to his merit. The whole will of the said Nicholas Gimcrack, Esq. is a curious document and exact picture of the mind of the worthy virtuoso defunct, where his various follies, littlenesses, and quaint humours are set forth, as orderly and distinct as his butterflies' wings and cockle-shells and skeletons of fleas in glass-cases.'

' It is as follows :

*“ The Will of a Virtuoso.*

“ I Nicholas Gimcrack, being in sound Health of Mind, but in great Weakness of Body, do by this my Last Will and Testament bequeath my worldly Goods and Chattels in Manner following :

*Imprimis*, To my dear Wife,  
     One Box of Butterflies,  
 •     One Drawer of Shells,  
 •     A Female Skeleton,  
     A dried Cockatrice.



We often successfully try in this way to give the finishing stroke to our pictures, hang up our weaknesses in perpetuity, and embalm our mistakes in the memories of others.

“Even from the tomb the voice of nature cries,  
Even in our ashes live their wonted fires.”

I shall not speak here of unwarrantable commands imposed upon survivors, by which they were to carry into effect the sullen and

*Item, To my Daughter Elizabeth,*

My Receipt for preserving dead Caterpillars.

As also my Preparations of Winter May Dew, and Embryo Pickle.

*Item, To my little Daughter Fanny,*

Three Crocodile's Eggs.

And upon the Birth of her first Child, if she marries with her Mother's Consent,

The Nest of a Humming-Bird.

*Item, To my eldest Brother, as an Acknowledgment for the*

Lands he has vested in my Son Charles, I bequeath

My last Year's Collection of Grasshoppers.

*Item, To his Daughter Susanna, being his only Child, I bequeath my*

*English Weeds* pasted on Royal Paper,

With my large Folio of *Indian Cabbage*.

Having fully provided for my Nephew Isaac, by making over to him, some Years since,

revengeful purposes of unprincipled men, after they had breathed their last : but we meet with continual examples of the desire to keep up the farce (if not the tragedy) of life, after we, the performers in it, have quitted the stage, and to have our parts rehearsed by proxy. We thus make a caprice immortal, a peculiarity proverbial. Hence we see the number of legacies and fortunes left, on condition that the legatee shall take the name

A Horned *Scarabæus*,  
 The Skin of a Rattle-Snake, and  
 The mummy of an *Egyptian King*,  
 I make no further Provision for him in this my Will.

My eldest Son *John* having spoken disrespectfully of his little Sister, whom I keep by me in Spirits of Wine, and in many other Instances behaved himself undutifully towards me, I do disinherit, and wholly cut off from any Part of this my Personal Estate, by giving him a single Cockle-Shell.

To my Second Son *Charles*, I give and bequeath all my Flowers, Plants, Minerals, Mosses, Shells, Pebbles, Fossils, Beetles, Butterflies, Caterpillars, Grasshoppers, and Vermin, not above specified : As also all my Monsters, both wet and dry, making the said *Charles* whole and sole Executor of this my Last Will and Testament, he paying or causing to be paid the aforesaid Legacies within the Space of Six Months after my Decease. And I do hereby revoke all other Wills whatsoever by me formerly made."—TATLER, Vol. IV. No. 216.

and style of the testator, by which device we provide for the continuance of the sounds that formed our names—and endow them with an estate, that they may be repeated with proper respect. In the *Memoirs of an Heiress*, all the difficulties of the plot turn on the necessity imposed by a clause in her uncle's will 'that her future husband should take the family-name of Beverley. Poor Cecilia! What delicate perplexities she was thrown into by this improvident provision; and with what minute, endless, intricate distresses has the fair authoress been enabled to harrow up the reader on this account! There was a Sir Thomas Dyot in the reign of Charles II, who left the whole range of property which forms Dyot-street in St. Giles's and the neighbourhood, on the sole and express condition that it should be appropriated entirely to that sort of buildings, and to the reception of that sort of population, which still keep undisputed, undivided possession of it. The name was changed the other day to George-street as a more genteel appellation, which, I should think, is an indirect forfeiture of the estate. This Sir

Thomas Dyot I should be disposed to put upon the list of old English worthies—as humane, liberal, and no flincher from what he took in his head. He was no common-place man in his line. He was the best commentator on that old-fashioned text—“The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.”—We find some that are curious in the mode in which they shall be buried, and others in the place. Lord Camelford had his remains buried under an ash-tree that grew on one of the mountains in Switzerland; and Sir Francis Bourgeois had a little mausoleum built for him in the College at Dulwich, where he once spent a pleasant, jovial day with the Masters and Wardens.<sup>1</sup> It is, no doubt, proper to attend, except for good reasons to the contrary, to these sort of requests; for by breaking faith with the dead, we loosen the

<sup>1</sup> Kellerman lately left his heart to be buried in the field of Valmy, where the first great battle was fought in the year 1792, in which the Allies were repulsed. Oh! might that heart prove the root from which the tree of Liberty may spring up and flourish once more, as the basil-tree grew and grew from the cherished head of Isabella's lover!

confidence of the living. Besides, there is a stronger argument : we sympathise with the dead as well as with the living, and are bound to them by the most sacred of all ties, our own involuntary fellow-feeling with others!

Thieves, as a last donation, leave advice to their friends, physicians a nostrum, authors a manuscript work, rakes a confession of their faith in the virtue of the sex—all, the last drivellings of their egotism and impertinence. One might suppose that if any thing could, the approach and contemplation of death might bring men to a sense of reason and self-knowledge. On the contrary, it seems only to deprive them of the little wit they had, and to make them even more the sport of their wilfulness and short-sightedness. Some men think that because they are going to be hanged, they are fully authorised to declare a future state of rewards and punishments. All either indulge their caprices or cling to their prejudices. They make a desperate attempt to escape from reflection by taking hold of any whim or fancy that crosses their minds,

or by throwing themselves implicitly on old habits and attachments.

An old man is twice a child : the dying man becomes the property of his family. He has no choice left, and his voluntary power is merged in old saws and prescriptive usages. The property we have derived from our kindred reverts tacitly to them : and not to let it take its course, is a sort of violence done to nature as well as custom. The idea of property, of something in common, does not mix cordially with friendship, but is inseparable from near relationship. We owe a return in kind, where we feel no obligation for a favour ; and consign our possessions to our next of kin as mechanically as we lean our heads on the pillow, and go out of the world in the same state of stupid amazement that we came into it !

## ESSAY VII.

### ON A LANDSCAPE OF NICOLAS POUSSIN.

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“And blind Orion hungry for the morn.”

KFATS.

ORION, the subject of this landscape, was the classical Nimrod; and is called by Homer, “a hunter of shadows, himself a shade.” He was the son of Neptune; and having lost an eye in some affray between the Gods and men, was told that if he would go to meet the rising sun, he would recover his sight. He is represented setting out on his journey, with men on his shoulders to guide him, a bow in his hand, and Diana in the clouds greeting him. He stalks along, a giant upon earth, and reels and falters in his gait, as if just awaked out of sleep, or uncertain of his way;—you see his blindness, though his back is turned. Mists

rise around him, and veil the sides of the green forests ; earth is dank and fresh with dews, the “grey dawn and the Pleiades before him dance,” and in the distance are seen the blue hills and sullen ocean. Nothing was ever more finely conceived or done. The picture breathes the spirit of the morning ; its moisture, its repose, its obscurity, waiting the miracle of light to kindle it into smiles : the whole is, like the principal figure in it, “a forerunner of the dawn.” The same atmosphere tinges and imbues every object, the same dull light “shadowy sets off” the face of nature : one feeling of vastness, of strangeness, and of primeval forms pervades the painter’s canvas, and we are thrown back upon the first integrity of things. This great and learned man might be said to see nature through the glass of time : he alone has a right to be considered as the painter of classical antiquity. Sir Joshua has done him justice in this respect. He could give to the scenery of his heroic fables the unimpaired look of original nature, full, solid, large, luxuriant, teeming with life and power ; or deck it with all the pomp of art, with tem-



ples and towers, and mythologic groves. His pictures "denote a foregone conclusion." He applies nature to his purposes, works out her images according to the standard of his thoughts, embodies high fictions; and the first conception being given, all the rest seems to grow out of, and be assimilated to it, by the unfailing process of a studious imagination. Like his own Orion, he overlooks the surrounding scene, appears to "take up the isles as a very little thing, and to lay the earth in a balance." With a laborious and mighty grasp, he put nature into the mould of the ideal and antique; and was among painters (more than any one else) what Milton was among poets. There is in both something of the same pedantry, the same stiffness, the same elevation, the same grandeur, the same mixture of art and nature, the same richness of borrowed materials, the same unity of character. Neither the poet nor the painter lowered the subjects they treated but filled up the outline in the fancy, and added strength and prominence to it; and thus not only satisfied, but surpassed the expectations of the spectator and the reader.

This should be held for the triumph and the perfection of works of art. To give us nature, such as we see it, is well and deserving of praise; to give us nature such as we have never seen, but have often wished to see it, is better, and deserving of higher praise. He who can shew the world in its first naked glory, with the hues of fancy spread over it, or in its high and palmy state, with the gravity of history stamped on the proud monuments of vanished empire,—who, by his “so potent art,” can recall time past, transport us to distant places, and join the regions of imagination (a new conquest) to those of reality,—who teaches us not only what nature is, but what she has been, and is capable of being,—he who does this, and does it with simplicity, with truth, and grandeur, is lord of nature and her powers; and his mind is universal, and his art the master-art!

There is nothing in this “more than natural,” if criticism could be persuaded to think so. The historic painter does not neglect or contravene nature, but follows her more closely up into her fantastic heights, or hidden recesses. He demonstrates what she would

be in conceivable circumstances, and under implied conditions. He "gives to airy nothing a local habitation," not "a name." At his touch, words start up into images, thoughts become things. He clothes a dream, a phantom with form and colour and the wholesome attributes of reality. *His* art is a second nature; not a different one. There are those, indeed, who think that *not to copy nature*, is the rule for attaining perfection. Because they cannot paint the objects which they have seen, they fancy themselves qualified to paint the ideas which they have not seen. But it is possible to fail in this latter and more difficult style of imitation, as well as in the former humbler one. The detection, it is true, is not so easy, because the objects are not so nigh at hand to compare; and therefore there is more room both for false pretension and for self-deceit. They take an epic motto or subject, and conclude that the spirit is implied as a thing of course. They paint inferior portraits, maudlin lifeless faces, without ordinary expression, or one look, feature, or particle of nature in them, and think that this is to rise to

the truth of history. They vulgarise and degrade whatever is interesting or sacred to the mind, and suppose that they thus add to the dignity of their profession. They represent a face that seems as if no thought or feeling of any kind had ever passed through it, and would have you believe that this is the very sublime of expression, such as it would appear in heroes, or demi-gods of old, when rapture or agony was carried to its height. They shew you a landscape that looks as if the sun never shone upon it, and tell you that it is not modern—that so earth looked when Titan first kissed it with his rays. This is not the true *ideal*. It is not to fill the moulds of the imagination, but to deface and injure them : it is not to come up to, but to fall short of the poorest conception in the public mind. Such pictures should not be hung in the same room with that of Orion.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Every thing tends to shew the manner in which a great artist is formed. If any person could claim an exemption from the careful imitation of individual objects, it was Nicolas Poussin. He studied the antique, but he also studied nature. "I have often admired," says Vignuel de Marville, who knew him at a late period of his life, "the love he had for his art. Old as

Poussin was, of all painters, the most poetical. He was the painter of ideas. No one ever told a story half so well; nor so well knew what was capable of being told by the pencil. He seized on, and struck off with grace and precision, just that point of view which would be likely to catch the reader's fancy. There is a significance, a consciousness in whatever

he was, I frequently saw him among the ruins of ancient Rome, out in the Campagna, or along the banks of the Tiber, sketching a scene that had pleased him; and I often met him with his handkerchief full of stones, moss, or flowers, which he carried home, that he might copy them exactly from nature. One day I asked him how he had attained to such a degree of perfection, as to have gained so high a rank among the great painters of Italy? He answered, I HAVE NEGLECTED NOTHING." —*See his Life lately published.* It appears from this account that he had not fallen into a recent error, that Nature puts the man of genius out. As a contrast to the foregoing description, I might mention, that I remember an old gentleman once asking Mr. West in the British Gallery, if he had ever been at Athens? To which the president made answer, No; nor did he feel any great desire to go; for that he thought he had as good an idea of the place from the Catalogue, as he could get by living there for any number of years. What would he have said, if any one had told him, he could get as good an idea of the subject of one of his great works from reading the catalogue of it, as from seeing the picture itself? Yet the answer was characteristic of the genius of the painter.

he does (sometimes a vice, but oftener a virtue) beyond any other painter. His Giants sitting on the tops of craggy mountains, as huge themselves, and playing idly on their Pan's-pipes, seem to have been seated there these three thousand years, and to know the beginning and the end of their own story. An infant Bacchus or Jupiter is big with his future destiny. Even inanimate and dumb things speak a language of their own. His snakes, the messengers of fate, are inspired with human intellect. His trees grow and expand their leaves in the air, glad of the rain, proud of the sun, awake to the winds of heaven. In his Plague of Athens, the very buildings seem stiff with horror. His picture of the Deluge is, perhaps, the finest historical landscape in the world. You see a waste of waters, wide, interminable: the sun is labouring, wan and weary, up the sky; the clouds, dull and leaden, lie like a load upon the eye, and heaven and earth seem commingling into one confused mass! His human figures are sometimes "over-informed" with this kind of feeling. Their actions have too much gesticulation, and the

set expression of the features borders too much on the mechanical and caricatured style. In this respect, they form a contrast to Raphael's, whose figures never appear to be sitting for their pictures, or to be conscious of a spectator, or to have come from the painter's hand. In Nicolas Poussin, on the contrary, every thing seems to have a distinct understanding with the artist: "the very stones prate of their whereabouts:" each object has its part and place assigned, and is in a sort of compact with the rest of the picture. It is this conscious keeping, and, as it were, *internal* design, that gives their peculiar character to the works of our artist. There was a picture of Aurora in the British Gallery a year or two ago. It was a suffusion of golden light. The Goddess wore her saffron-coloured robes, and appeared just risen from the gloomy bed of old Tithonus. Her very steeds, milk-white, were tinged with the yellow dawn. It was a personification of the morning.—Poussin succeeded better in his classic than in his sacred subjects. The latter are comparatively heavy, forced, full of violent contrasts of colour, of red, blue, and black,

and without the true prophetic inspiration of the characters. But in his Pagan allegories and fables he was quite at home. The native gravity and native levity of the Frenchman were combined with Italian scenery and an antique gusto, and gave even to his colouring an air of learned indifference. He wants, in one respect, grace, form, expression ; but he has everywhere sense and meaning, perfect costume and propriety. His personages always belong to the class and time represented, and are strictly versed in the business in hand. His grotesque compositions in particular, his Nymphs and Fauns, are superior (at least, as far as style is concerned) even to those of Rubens. They are taken more immediately out of fabulous history. Rubens's Satyrs and Bacchantes have a more jovial and voluptuous aspect, are more drunk with pleasure, more full of animal spirits and riotous impulses ; they laugh and bound along—

“ Leaping like wanton kids in pleasant spring : ”

but those of Poussin have more of the intellectual part of the character, and seem vicious on



reflection, and of set purpose. Rubens's are noble specimens of a class; Poussin's are allegorical abstractions of the same class, with bodies less pampered, but with minds more secretly depraved. The Bacchanalian groups of the Flemish painter were, however, his master-pieces in composition. Witness these prodigies of colour, character, and expression at Blenheim. In the more chaste and refined delineation of classic fable, Poussin was without a rival. Rubens, who was a match for him in the wild and picturesque, could not pretend to vie with the elegance and purity of thought in his picture of Apollo giving a poet a cup of water to drink, nor with the gracefulness of design in the figure of a Nymph squeezing the juice of a bunch of grapes from her fingers (a rosy wine-press) which falls into the mouth of a chubby infant below. But, above all, who shall celebrate, in terms of fit praise, his picture of the shepherds in the Vale of Tempe going out in a fine morning of the spring, and coming to a tomb with this inscription:—*ET EGO IN ARCADIA VIXI!* The eager curiosity of some, the expression of others who

start back with fear and surprise, the clear breeze playing with the branches of the shadowing trees, "the valleys low, where the mild zephyrs use," the distant, uninterrupted, sunny prospect speak (and forever will speak on) of ages past to ages yet to come !<sup>\*</sup>

Pictures are a set of chosen images, a succession of pleasant thoughts passing through the mind. It is a luxury to have the walls of our rooms hung round with them; and no less so to have such a gallery in the mind, to con over the relics of ancient art bound up "within the book and volume of the brain, unmixed (if it were possible) with baser matter !" A life spent among pictures, in the study and the love of art, is a happy noiseless dream : or rather, it is to dream and to be awake at the same time ; for it has all " the sober certainty of waking bliss," with the romantic voluptuousness of a visionary and abstracted being. They are the bright consummate essences of things, and we may say that he

\* Poussin has repeated this subject more than once, and appears to have revelled in its witcheries. I have before alluded to it.

“ Who of these delights can judge and knows  
To interpose them oft, is not unwise.”

The Orion, which I have here taken occasion to descant upon, is one of a collection of excellent pictures, as this collection is itself one of a series from the Old Masters, which have for some years past embrowned the walls of the British Gallery, and enriched the public eye. What hues (those of nature mellowed by time) breathe around, as we enter! What forms are there, woven into the memory! What looks, which only the answering looks of the spectator can express! What intellectual stores have been yearly poured forth from the shrine of ancient art! The works are various, but the names the same—heaps of Rembrandts frowning from the darkened walls, Rubens's glad gorgeous groups, Titians more rich and rare, Claudes always exquisite, sometimes beyond compare, Guido's endless cloying sweetness, the learning of Poussin and the Caracci, and Raphael's princely magnificence, crowning all. We read certain letters and syllables in the Catalogue, and at the well-known magic

sound, a miracle of skill and beauty starts to view. I might be thought that one year's prodigal display of such perfection would exhaust the labours of one man's life; but the next year, and the next to that, we find another harvest reaped and gathered in to the great garner of art, by the same immortal hands—

“Old GENIUS the porter of them was;  
He letteth in, he letteth out to wend.”—

Their works seem endless as their reputation—to be many, as they are complete—to multiply with the desire of the mind to see more and more of them; as if there were a living power in the breath of Fame, and in the very names of the great heirs of glory “there were propagation too!” It is something to have a collection of this sort to count upon once a year; to have one last, lingering look yet to come. Pictures are scattered “like stray-gifts through the world;” and while they remain, earth has yet a little gilding left, not quite rubbed off, dishonoured, and defaced. There are plenty of standard works still to be found in this country, in the collections at

Blenheim, at Burleigh, and in those belonging to Mr. Angerstein, Lord Grosvenor, the Marquis of Stafford, and others, to keep up this treat to the lovers of art for many years : and it is the more desirable to reserve a privileged sanctuary of this sort, where the eye may dote, and the heart take its fill of such pictures as Poussin's Orion, since the Louvre is stripped of its triumphant spoils, and since he, who collected it, and wore it as a rich jewel in his Iron Crown, the hunter of greatness and of glory, is himself a shade !

## ESSAY VIII.

### ON GOING A JOURNEY.

---

ONE of the pleasantest things in the world is going a journey; but I like to go by myself. I can enjoy society in a room; but out of doors, nature is company enough for me. I am then never less alone than when alone.

“The fields his study, nature was his book.”

I cannot see the wit of walking and talking at the same time. When I am in the country, I wish to vegetate like the country. I am not for criticising hedge-rows and black cattle. I go out of town in order to forget the town and all that is in it. There are those who for this purpose go to watering-places, and carry the metropolis with them. I like more elbow-room, and fewer incumbrances. I like soli-

tude, when I give myself up to it, for the sake of solitude ; nor do I ask for

——“ a friend in my retreat,  
Whom I may whisper solitude is sweet.”

The soul of a journey is liberty; perfect liberty, to think, feel, do just as one pleases. We go a journey chiefly to be free of all impediments and of all inconveniences ; to leave ourselves behind, much more to get rid of others. It is because I want a little breathing-space to muse on indifferent matters, where Contemplation

“ May plume her feathers and let grow her wings,  
That in the various bustle of resort  
Were all too ruffled, and sometimes impair'd,”

that I absent myself from the town for a while, without feeling at a loss the moment I am left by myself. Instead of a friend in a post-chaise or in a tilbury, to exchange good things with, and vary the same stale topics over again, for once let me have a truce with impertinence. Give me the clear blue sky over my head, and the green turf beneath my feet, a winding road before me, and a three

hours' march to dinner—and then to thinking! It is hard if I cannot start some game on these lone heaths. I laugh, I run, I leap, I sing for joy. From the point of yonder rolling cloud, I plunge into my past being, and revel there, as the sun-burnt Indian plunges headlong into the wave that wafts him to his native shore. Then long-forgotten things, like “sunken wrack and sumless treasures,” burst upon my eager sight, and I begin to feel, think, and be myself again. Instead of an awkward silence, broken by attempts at wit or dull common-places, mine is that undisturbed silence of the heart which alone is perfect eloquence. No one likes puns, alliterations, antitheses, argument, and analysis better than I do; but I sometimes had rather be without them. “Leave, oh, leave me to my repose!” I have just now other business in hand, which would seem idle to you, but is with me “the very stuff of the conscience.” Is not this wild rose sweet without a comment? Does not this daisy leap to my heart, set in its coat of emerald? Yet if I were to explain to you the circumstance that has so



endeared it to me, you would only smile. Had I not better then keep it to myself, and let it serve me to brood over, from here to yonder craggy point, and from thence onward to the far-distant horizon? I should be but bad company all that way, and therefore prefer being alone. I have heard it said that you may, when the moody fit comes on, walk or ride on by yourself, and indulge your reveries. But this looks like a breach of manners, a neglect of others, and you are thinking all the time that you ought to rejoin your party. "Out upon such half-faced fellowship," say I. I like to be either entirely to myself, or entirely at the disposal of others; to talk or be silent, to walk or sit still, to be sociable or solitary. I was pleased with an observation of Mr. Cobbett's, that "he thought it a bad French custom to drink our wine with our meals, and that an Englishman ought to do only one thing at a time." So I cannot talk and think, or indulge in melancholy musing and lively conversation by fits and starts. "Let me have a companion of my way," says Sterne. "were it but to remark how the

shadows lengthen as the sun goes down." It is beautifully said : but in my opinion, this continual comparing of notes interferes with the involuntary impression of things upon the mind, and hurts the sentiment. If you only hint what you feel in a kind of dumb show, it is insipid : if you have to explain it, it is making a toil of a pleasure. You cannot read the book of nature, without being perpetually put to the trouble of translating it for the benefit of others. I am for the synthetical method on a journey, in preference to the analytical. I am content to lay in a stock of ideas then, and to examine and anatomise them afterwards. I want to see my vague notions float like the down of the thistle before the breeze, and not to have them entangled in the briars and thorns of controversy. For once, I like to have it all my own way ; and this is impossible, unless you are alone, or in such company as I do not covet. I have no objection to argue a point with any one for twenty miles of measured road, but not for pleasure. If you remark the scent of a bean-field crossing the road,

perhaps your fellow-traveller has no smell. If you point to a distant object, perhaps he is short-sighted, and has to take out his glass to look at it. There is a feeling in the air, a tone in the colour of a cloud which hits your fancy, but the effect of which you are unprepared to account for. There is then no sympathy, but an uneasy craving after it, and a dissatisfaction which pursues you on the way, and in the end probably produces ill humour. Now I never quarrel with myself, and take all my own conclusions for granted till I find it necessary to defend them against objections. It is not merely that you may not be of accord on the objects and circumstances that present themselves before you—they may recall a number of ideas, and lead to associations too delicate and refined to be possibly communicated to others. Yet these I love to cherish, and sometimes still fondly clutch them, when I can escape from the throng to do so. To give way to our feelings before company, seems extravagance or affectation; on the other hand, to have to unravel this mystery of our being at every

turn, and to make others take an equal interest in it (otherwise the end is not answered) is a task to which few are competent. We must “give it an understanding, but no tongue.” My old friend Coleridge, however, could do both. He could go on in the most delightful explanatory way over hill and dale, a summer’s day, and convert a landscape into a didactic poem or a Pindaric ode. “He talked far above singing.” If I could so clothe my ideas in sounding and flowing words, I might perhaps wish to have some one with me to admire the swelling theme; or I could be more content, were it possible for me still to hear his echoing voice in the woods of All-Foxden. They had “that fine madness in them which our first poets had;” and if they could have been caught by some rare instrument, would have breathed such strains as the following :

——“Here be woods as green

As any, air likewise as fresh and sweet

As when smooth Zephyrus plays on the fleet

Face of the curled stream, with flow’rs as many

As the young spring gives, and as choice as any;

Here be all new delights, cool streams, and wells,  
 Arbours o'ergrown with woodbine, caves and dells;  
 Choose where thou wilt, while I sit by and sing,  
 Or gather rushes to make many a ring  
 For thy long fingers; tell thee tales of love,  
 How the pale Phœbe, hunting in a grove,  
 First saw the boy Endymion, from whose eyes  
 She took eternal fire that never dies;  
 How she convey'd him softly in a sleep,  
 His temples bound with poppy, to the steep  
 Head of old Latmos, where she stoops each night,  
 Gilding the mountain with her brother's light,  
 To kiss her sweetest."——

FAITHFUL SHEPHERDESS.

Had I words and images at command like these, I would attempt to wake the thoughts that lie slumbering on golden ridges in the evening clouds : but at the sight of nature my fancy, poor as it is, droops and closes up its leaves, like flowers at sunset. I can make nothing out on the spot :—I must have time to collect myself.

In general, a good thing spoils out-of-door prospects : it should be reserved for Table-talk. L—— is for this reason, I take it, the worst company in the world out of doors ; because he is the best within. I grant, there is one subject on which it is pleasant to talk

on a journey; and that is, what one shall have for supper when we get to our inn at night. The open air improves this sort of conversation or friendly altercation, by setting a keener edge on appetite. Every mile of the road heightens the flavour of the viands we expect at the end of it. How fine it is to enter some old town, walled and turreted, just at the approach of night-fall, or to come to some straggling village, with the lights streaming through the surrounding gloom; and then after inquiring for the best entertainment that the place affords, to “take one’s ease at one’s inn!” These eventful moments in our lives are in fact too precious, too full of solid, heart-felt happiness to be frittered and dribbled away in imperfect sympathy. I would have them all to myself, and drain them to the last drop: they will do to talk of or to write about afterwards. What a delicate speculation it is, after drinking whole goblets of tea,

“The cups that cheer, but not inebriate,”

and letting the fumes ascend into the brain, to sit considering what we shall have for supper

—eggs and a rasher, a rabbit smothered in onions, or an excellent veal-cutlet! Sanchez in such a situation once fixed upon cow-heel; and his choice, though he could not help it, is not to be disparaged. Then, in the intervals of pictured scenery and Shandean contemplation, to catch the preparation and the stir in the kitchen—*Procul, O procul este profani!* These hours are sacred to silence and to musing, to be treasured up in the memory, and to feed the source of smiling thoughts hereafter. I would not waste them in idle talk; or if I must have the integrity of fancy broken in upon, I would rather it were by a stranger than a friend. A stranger takes his hue and character from the time and place; he is a part of the furniture and costume of an inn. If he is a Quaker, or from the West Riding of Yorkshire, so much the better. I do not even try to sympathise with him, and he *breaks no squares*. I associate nothing with my travelling companion but present objects and passing events. In his ignorance of me and my affairs, I in a manner forget myself. But a friend reminds one of other things,

rips up old grievances, and destroys the abstraction of the scene. He comes in ungraciously between us and our imaginary character. Something is dropped in the course of conversation that gives a hint of your profession and pursuits; or from having some one with you that knows the less sublime portions of your history, it seems that other people do. You are no longer a citizen of the world: but your "unhoused free condition is put into circumscription and confine." The *incognito* of an inn is one of its striking privileges—"lord of one's-self, uncumber'd with a name." Oh! it is great to shake off the trammels of the world and of public opinion—to lose our importunate, tormenting, everlasting personal identity in the elements of nature, and become the creature of the moment, clear of all ties—to hold to the universe only by a dish of sweet-breads, and to owe nothing but the score of the evening—and no longer seeking for applause and meeting with contempt, to be known by no other title than *the Gentleman in the parlour!* One may take one's choice of all characters in this romantic state



of uncertainty as to one's real pretensions, and become indefinitely respectable and negatively right-worshipful. We baffle prejudice and disappoint conjecture; and from being so to others, begin to be objects of curiosity and wonder even to ourselves. We are no more those hackneyed common-places that we appear in the world: an inn restores us to the level of nature, and quits scores with society! I have certainly spent some enviable hours at inns—sometimes when I have been left entirely to myself, and have tried to solve some metaphysical problem, as once at Witham-Common, where I found out the proof that likeness is not a case of the association of ideas—at other times, when there have been pictures in the room, as at St. Neot's (I think it was) where I first met with Gribelin's engravings of the Cartoons, into which I entered at once; and at a little inn on the borders of Wales, where there happened to be hanging some of Westall's drawings, which I compared triumphantly (for a theory that I had, not for the admired artist) with the figure of a girl who had ferried me over the Severn,

standing up in the boat between me and the fading twilight—at other times I might mention luxuriating in books with a peculiar interest in this way, as I remember sitting up half the night to read Paul and Virginia, which I picked up at an inn at Bridgewater, after being drenched in the rain all day; and at the same place I got through two volumes of Madame D'Arblay's Camilla. It was on the tenth of April, 1798, that I sat down to a volume of the New Eloise, at the inn at Llangollen, over a bottle of sherry and a cold chicken. The letter I chose was St. Preux's description of his feelings as he first caught a glimpse from the heights of the Jura of the Pays de Vaud, which I had brought with me as a *bonne bouche* to crown the evening with. It was my birth-day, and I had for the first time come from a place in the neighbourhood to visit this delightful spot. The road to Llangollen turns off between Chirk and Wrexham; and on passing a certain point, you come all at once upon the valley, which opens like an amphitheatre, broad, barren hills rising in majestic state on either side, with “green

upland swells that echo to the bleat of flocks' below, and the river Dee babbling over its stony bed in the midst of them. The valley at this time "glittered green with sunny showers," and a budding ash-tree dipped its tender branches in the chiding stream. How proud, how glad I was to walk along the high road that commanded the delicious prospect, repeating the lines which I have just quoted from Mr. Coleridge's poems! But besides the prospect which opened beneath my feet, another also opened to my inward sight, a heavenly vision, on which were written, in letters large as Hope could make them, these four words, LIBERTY, GENIUS, LOVE, VIRTUE; which have since faded into the light of common day, or mock my idle gaze.


"The beautiful is vanished, and returns not."

Still I would return some time or other to this enchanted spot; but I would return to it alone. What other self could I find to share that influx of thoughts, of regret, and delight, the traces of which I could hardly conjure up to myself, so much have they been broken

and defaced! I could stand on some tall rock, and overlook the precipice of years that separates me from what I then was. I was at that time going shortly to visit the poet whom I have above named. Where is he now? Not only I myself have changed—the world, which was then new to me, has become old and incorrigible. Yet will I turn to thee in thought, O sylvan Dee, as then thou wert in joy, in youth and gladness; and thou shalt always be to me the river of Paradise, where I will drink of the waters of life freely!

There is hardly any thing that shews the short-sightedness or capriciousness of the imagination more than travelling does. With change of place we change our ideas, nay, our opinions and feelings. We can by an effort indeed transport ourselves to old and long-forgotten scenes, and then the picture of the mind revives again; but we forget those that we have just left. It seems that we can think but of one place at a time. The canvas of the fancy has only a certain extent, and if we paint one set of objects upon it, they imme-

diately efface every other. We cannot enlarge our conceptions; we only shift our point of view. The landscape bares its bosom to the enraptured eye; we take our fill of it; and seem as if we could form no other image of beauty or grandeur. We pass on, and think no more of it: the horizon that shuts ~~it~~ from our sight also blots it from our memory, like a dream. In travelling through a wild barren country, I can form no idea of a woody and cultivated one. It appears to me that all the world must be barren, like what I see of it. In the country we forget the town, and in town we despise the country. "Beyond Hyde Park," says Sir Fopling Flutter, "all is a desert." All that part of the map that we do not see before us is a blank. The world in our conceit of it is not much bigger than a nutshell. It is not one prospect expanded into another, county joined to county, kingdom to kingdom, lands to seas, making an image voluminous and vast;—the mind can form no larger idea of space than the eye can take in at a single glance. The rest is a name written on a map, a calculation of arithmetic. For



distance, what is the true signification of that immense mass of territory and population, known by the name of China to us? An inch of paste-board on a wooden globe, of no more account than a China orange! Things near us are seen of the size of life: things at a distance are diminished to the size of the understanding. We measure the universe by ourselves, and even comprehend the texture of our own being only piece-meal. In this way, however, we remember an infinity of things and places. The mind is like a mechanical instrument that plays a great variety of tunes, but it must play them in succession. One idea recalls another, but it at the same time excludes all others. In trying to renew old recollections, we cannot as it were unfold the whole web of our existence; we must pick out the single threads. So in coming to a place where we have formerly lived and with which we have intimate associations, every one must have found that the feeling grows more vivid the nearer we approach the spot, from the mere anticipation of the actual impression: we remember circumstances, feel-

ings, persons, faces, names, that we had not thought of for years ; but for the time all the rest of the world is forgotten !—To return to the question I have quitted above.

I have no objection to go to see ruins, aqueducts, pictures, in company with a friend or a party, but rather the contrary, for the former reason reversed. They are intelligible matters, and will bear talking about. The sentiment here is not tacit, but communicable and overt. Salisbury Plain is barren of criticism ; but Stonehenge will bear a discussion antiquarian, picturesque, and philosophical. In setting out on a party of pleasure, the first consideration always is where we shall go : in taking a solitary ramble, the question is what we shall meet with by the way. The mind then is “its own place ;” nor are we anxious to arrive at the end of our journey. I can myself do the honours indifferently well to works of art and curiosity. I once took a party to Oxford with no mean *éclat*—shewed them that seat of the Muses at a distance,

“ With glistening spires and pinnacles adorn’d”—

rescanted on the learned air that breathes from the grassy quadrangles and stone-walls of halls and colleges—was at home in the Bodleian; and at Blenheim quite superseded the powdered Ciceroni that attended us, and that pointed in vain with his wand to commonplace beauties in matchless pictures.—As another exception to the above reasoning, I should not feel confident in venturing on a journey in a foreign country without a companion. I should want at intervals to hear the sound of my own language. There is an involuntary antipathy in the mind of an Englishman to foreign manners and notions, that requires the assistance of social sympathy to carry it off. As the distance from home increases, this relief, which was at first a luxury, becomes a passion and an appetite. A person would almost feel stifled to find himself in the deserts of Arabia without friends and countrymen: there must be allowed to be something in the view of Athens or old Rome, that claims the utterance of speech; and I own that the Pyramids are too mighty for any single contemplation. In such situations, so opposite



to all one's ordinary train of ideas, one seems a species by one's-self, a limb torn off from society, unless one can meet with instant fellowship and support.—Yet I did not feel this want or craving very pressing once, when I first set my foot on the laughing shores of France. Calais was peopled with novelty and delight. The confused, busy murmur of the place was like oil and wine poured into my ears; nor did the mariners' hymn, which was sung from the top of an old crazy vessel in the harbour, as the sun went down, send an alien sound into my soul. I breathed the air of general humanity. I walked over “the vine-covered hills and gay regions of France,” erect and satisfied; for the image of man was not cast down and chained to the foot of arbitrary thrones. I was at no loss for language, for that of all the great schools of painting was open to me. The whole is vanished like a shade. Pictures, heroes, glory, freedom, all are fled: nothing remains but the Bourbons and the French people!—There is undoubtedly a sensation in travelling into foreign parts that is to be had nowhere else: but it is more

pleasing at the time than lasting. It is too remote from our habitual associations to be a common topic of discourse or reference; and, like a dream or another state of existence, does not piece into our daily modes of life. It is an animated but a momentary hallucination. It demands an effort to exchange our actual for our ideal identity; and to feel the pulse of our old transports revive very keenly, we must "jump" all our present comforts and connexions. Our romantic and itinerant character is not to be domesticated. Dr. Johnson remarked how little foreign travel added to the facilities of conversation in those who had been abroad. In fact, the time we have spent there is both delightful and in one sense instructive; but it appears to be cut out of our substantial, downright existence, and never to join kindly on to it. We are not the same, but another, and perhaps more enviable individual, all the time we are out of our own country. We are lost to ourselves, as well as to our friends. So the poet somewhat quaintly sings,

“Out of my country and myself I go.”

Those who wish to forget painful thoughts, do well to absent themselves for a while from the ties and objects that recall them: but we can be said only to fulfil our destiny in the place that gave us birth. I should on this account like well enough to spend the whole of my life in travelling abroad, if I could anywhere borrow another life to spend afterwards at home!

## ESSAY IX,

### WHY DISTANT OBJECTS PLEASE.

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DISTANT objects please, because, in the first place, they imply an idea of space and magnitude, and because, not being obtruded too close upon the eye, we clothe them with the indistinct and airy colours of fancy. In looking at the misty mountain-tops that bound the horizon, the mind is as it were conscious of all the conceivable objects and interests that lie between; we imagine all sorts of adventures in the interim; strain our hopes and wishes to reach the air-drawn circle, or to “descry new lands, rivers, and mountains,” stretching far beyond it: our feelings carried out of themselves lose their grossness and their husk, are rarefied, expanded, melt into softness and brighten into beauty, turning to “ethereal mould, sky-linctured.” We drink the air be-

fore us, and borrow a more refined existence from objects that hover on the brink of nothing. Where the landscape fades, from the dull sight, we fill the thin, viewless space with the shapes of unknown good, and tinge the hazy prospect with hopes and wishes and most charming fears.

“But thou, oh Hope! with eyes so fair.  
 What was thy delighted measure?  
 Still it whisper'd promised pleasure,  
 And bade the lovely scenes at distance hail!”

Whatever is placed beyond the reach of sense and knowledge, whatever is imperfectly discerned, the fancy pieces out at its leisure; and all but the present moment, but the present spot, passion claims for its own, and brooding over it with wings outspread, stamps it with an image of itself. Passion is lord of infinite space, and distant objects please because they border on its confines, and are moulded by its touch. When I was a boy, I lived within sight of a range of lofty hills, whose blue tops blending with the setting sun had often tempted my longing eyes and wandering feet. At last I put my project in execution, and on a

nearer approach, instead of glimmering air woven into fantastic shapes, found them huge lumpish heaps of discoloured earth. I learned from this (in part) to leave "Yarrow unvisited," and not idly to disturb a dream of good!

Distance of time has much the same effect as distance of place. It is not surprising that fancy colours the prospect of the future (as it thinks good,) when it even effaces the forms of memory. Time takes out the sting of pain; our sorrows after a certain period have been so often steeped in a medium of thought and passion, that they "unmould their essence;" and all that remains of our original impressions is what we would wish them to have been. Not only the untried steep ascent before us, but the rude, unsightly masses of our past experience presently resume their power of deception over the eye: the golden cloud soon rests upon their heads, and the purple light of fancy clothes their barren sides. Thus we pass on, while both ends of our existence touch upon Heaven!—There is (so to speak) "a mighty stream of tendency" to good in the

human mind, upon which all objects float and are imperceptibly borne along : and though in the voyage of life we meet with strong rebuffs, with rocks and quicksands, yet there is “ a tide in the affairs of men,” a heaving and a restless aspiration of the soul, by means of which, “ with sails and tackle torn,” the wreck and scattered fragments of our entire being drift into the port and haven of our desires ! In all that relates to the affections, we put the will for the deed :—the instant the pressure of unwelcome circumstances is removed, the mind recoils from their grasp, recovers its elasticity, and re-unites itself to that image of good, which is but a reflection and configuration of its own nature. Seen in the distance, in the long perspective of waning years, the meanest incidents, enlarged and enriched by countless recollections, become interesting ; the most painful, broken and softened by time, soothe. How any object, that unexpectedly brings back to us old scenes and associations, startles the mind ! What a yearning it creates within us ; what a longing to leap the intermediate space ! How fondly we cling to, and

try to revive the impression of all that we once were!

Such tricks hath strong Imagination!"

In truth, we impose upon ourselves, and know not what we wish. It is a cunning artifice, a ~~plain~~ delusion, by which, in pretending to be what we were at a particular moment of time, we would fain be all that we have since been, and have our lives to come over again. It is not the little, glimmering, almost annihilated speck in the distance, that rivets our attention and "hangs upon the beatings of our hearts:" it is the interval that separates us from it, and of which it is the trembling boundary, that excites all this coil and mighty pudder in the breast. Into that great gap in our being "come thronging soft desires" and infinite regrets. It is the contrast, the change from what we then were, that arms the half-extinguished recollection with its giant-strength, and lifts the fabric of the affections from its shadowy base. In contemplating its utmost verge, we overlook the map of our existence, and retread, in apprehension, the



journey of life. So it is that in early youth we strain our eager sight after the pursuits of manhood; and, as we are sliding off the stage, strive to gather up the toys and flowers that pleased our thoughtless childhood.

When I was quite a boy, my father used to take me to the Montpellier Tea-garden at Walworth. Do I go there now? No; the place is deserted, and its borders and its beds o'erturned. Is there, then, nothing that can

“Bring back the hour  
Of glory in the glass, of splendour in the flower?”

Oh! yes. I unlock the casket of memory, and draw back the warders of the brain; and there this scene of my infant wanderings still lives unfaded, or with fresher dyes. A new sense comes upon me, as in a dream; a richer perfume, brighter colours start out; my eyes dazzle; my heart heaves with its new load of bliss, and I am a child again. My sensations are all glossy, spruce, voluptuous, and fine: they wear a candied coat, and are in holiday trim. I see the beds of larkspur with purple eyes; tall hollyhocks, red and yellow; the broad

sun-flowers, caked in gold, with bees buzzing round them ; wildernesses of pinks, and hot-glowing pionies ; poppies run to seed ; the sugared lily, and faint mignonette, all ranged in order, and as thick as they can grow ; the box-tree borders ; the gravel-walks, the painted alcove, the confectionary, the clotted cream : — I think I see them now with sparkling looks ; or have they vanished while I have been writing this description of them ? No matter ; they will return again when I least think of them. All that I have observed since, of flowers and plants, and grass-plots, and of suburb delights, seems, to me, borrowed from “that first garden of my innocence” — to be slips and scions stolen from that bed of memory. In this manner the darlings of our childhood burnish out in the eye of after-years, and derive their sweetest perfume from the first heart-felt sigh of pleasure breathed upon them,

— — “like the sweet south,  
That breathes upon a bank of violets,  
Stealing and giving odour !”

‘If I have pleasure in a flower-garden, I have

in a kitchen-garden too, and for the same reason. If I see a row of cabbage-plants or of peas or beans coming up, I immediately think of those which I used so carefully to water of an evening at W——m, when my day's tasks were done, and of the pain with which I saw them droop and hang down their leaves in the morning's sun. Again, I never see a child's kite in the air, but it seems to pull at my heart. It is to me "a thing of life." I feel the twinge at my elbow, the flutter and palpitation, with which I used to let go the string of my own, as it rose in the air and towered among the clouds. My little cargo of hopes and fears ascended with it; and as it made a part of my own consciousness then, it does so still, and appears "like some gay creature of the element," my playmate when life was young, and twin-born with my earliest recollections. I could enlarge on this subject of childish amusements, but Mr. Leigh Hunt has treated it so well in a paper in the *Indicator*, on the productions of the toy-shops of the metropolis, that if I were to insist more on it, I should only pass for an imitator of that ir'ge-

nious and agreeable writer, and for an indifferent one into the bargain.

Sounds, smells, and sometimes tastes, are remembered longer than visible objects, and serve, perhaps, better for links in the chain of association. The reason seems to be this : they are in their nature intermittent, and comparatively rare ; whereas objects of sight are always before us, and, by their continuous succession, drive one another out. The eye is always open ; and between any given impression and its recurrence a second time, fifty thousand other impressions have, in all likelihood, been stamped upon the sense and on the brain. The other senses are not so active or vigilant. They are but seldom called into play. The ear, for example, is oftener courted by silence than noise ; and the sounds that break that silence sink deeper and more durably into the mind. I have for this reason a more present and lively recollection of certain scents, tastes, and sounds, than I have of mere visible images, because they are more original, and less worn by frequent repetition. Where there is nothing interposed between

any two impressions, whatever the distance of time that parts them, they naturally seem to touch ; and the renewed impression recalls the former one in full force, without distraction or competition. The taste of barberries, which have hung out in the snow during the severity of a North American winter, I have in my mouth still, after an interval of thirty years ; for I have met with no other taste, in all that time, at all like it. It remains by itself, almost like the impression of a sixth sense. But the colour is mixed up indiscriminately with the colours of many other berries, nor should I be able to distinguish it among them. The smell of a brick-kiln carries the evidence of its own identity with it : neither is it to me (from peculiar associations) unpleasant. The colour of brickdust, on the contrary, is more common, and easily confounded with other colours. Raphael did not keep it quite distinct from his flesh-colour. I will not say that we have a more perfect recollection of the human voice than of that complex picture, the human face ; but I think the sudden hearing of a well-known voice has something in it more affect-

ing and striking than the sudden meeting with the face : perhaps, indeed, this may be because we have a more familiar remembrance of the one than the other, and the voice takes us more by surprise on that account. I am by no means certain (generally speaking) that we have the ideas of the other senses so accurate and well made out as those of visible form : what I chiefly mean is, that the feelings belonging to the sensations of our other organs, when accidentally recalled, are kept more separate and pure. Musical sounds, probably, owe a good deal of their interest and romantic effect to the principle here spoken of. Were they constant, they would become indifferent, as we may find with respect to disagreeable noises, which we do not hear after a time. I know no situation more pitiable than that of a blind fiddler, who has but one sense left (if we except the sense of snuff-taking<sup>1</sup>), and who has that stunned or deafened by his own villainous noises ! Shakespear says,

“How silver-sweet sound lovers’ tongues by night!”

<sup>1</sup> See Wilkie’s Blind Fiddler.

It has been suggested, in explanation of this passage, that it is because in the day-time lovers are occupied with one another's faces, but that at night they can only distinguish the sound of each other's voices. I know not how this may be : but I have, ere now, heard a voice break so upon the silence,

“To angels’ ’twas most like,”

and charm the moonlight air with its balmy essence, while the budding leaves trembled to its accents. Would I might have heard it once more whisper peace and hope (as erst when it was mingled with the breath of spring), and with its soft pulsations lift winged fancy to heaven ! But it has ceased, or turned where I no more shall hear it !—Hence, also, we see what is the charm of the shepherd's pastoral reed ; and why we hear him, as it were, piping to his flock, even in a picture. Our ears are fancy-stung ! I remember once strolling along the margin of a stream, skirted with willows and plashy sedges, in one of those low sheltered valleys on Salisbury Plain, where the

monks of former ages had planted chapels and built hermits' cells. There was a little parish-church near; but tall elms and quivering alders hid it from my sight, when, all of a sudden, I was startled by the sound of the full organ pealing on the ear, accompanied by rustic voices and the willing quire of village-maids and children. It rose, indeed, "like an exhalation of rich distilled perfumes." The dew from a thousand pastures was gathered in its softness; the silence of a thousand years spoke in it. It came upon the heart like the calm beauty of death : fancy caught the sound, and faith mounted on it to the skies. It filled the valley like a mist, and still poured out its endless chaunt, and still it swells upon the ear, and wraps me in a golden trance, drowning the noisy tumult of the world !

There is a curious and interesting discussion, on the comparative distinctness of our visual and other external impressions, in Mr. Fearn's Essay on Consciousness, with which I shall try to descend from this rhapsody to the ground of common sense and plain reasoning again. After observing, a little before, that



“nothing is more untrue than that sensations of vision do necessarily leave more vivid and durable ideas than those of grosser senses,” he proceeds to give a number of illustrations in support of this position. “Notwithstanding,” he says, “the advantages here enumerated in favour of sight, I think there is no doubt that a man will come to forget acquaintance, and many other visible objects, noticed in mature age, before he will in the least forget tastes and smells, of only moderate interest, encountered either in his childhood, or at any time since.

“In the course of voyaging to various distant regions, it has several times happened that I have eaten once or twice of different things that never came in my way before nor since. Some of these have been pleasant, and some scarce better than insipid; but I have no reason to think I have forgot, or much altered the ideas left by those single impulses of taste; though here the memory of them certainly has not been preserved by repetition. It is clear I must have seen, as well as tasted those things; and I am decided that I remember the

tastes with more precision than I do the visual sensations.

“I remember having once, and only once, eat Kangaroo in New Holland ; and having once smelled a baker’s shop, having a peculiar odour, in the city of Bassorah. Now both these gross ideas remain with me quite as vivid as any visual ideas of those places ; and this could not be from repetition, but really from interest in the sensation.

“Twenty-eight years ago, in the island of Jamaica, I partook (perhaps twice) of a certain fruit, of the taste of which I have now a very fresh idea ; and I could add other instances of that period.

“I have had repeated proofs of having lost retention of visual objects, at various distances of time, though they had once been familiar. I have not, during thirty years, forgot the delicate, and in itself most trifling sensation, that the palm of my hand used to convey, when I was a boy, trying the different effects of what boys call *light* and *heavy* tops ; but I cannot remember within several shades of the brown coat which I left off a week ago.

If any man thinks he can do better, let him take an ideal survey of his wardrobe, and then actually refer to it for proof.

“ After retention of such ideas, it certainly would be very difficult to persuade me that feeling, taste, and smell can scarce be said to leave ideas, unless indistinct and obscure ones. . . .

“ Shew a Londoner correct models of twenty London churches, and, at the same time, a model of each, which differs, in several considerable features, from the truth, and I venture to say he shall not tell you, in any instance, which is the correct one, except by mere chance.

“ If he is an architect, he may be much more correct than any ordinary person : and this obviously is, because he has felt an interest in viewing these structures, which an ordinary person does not feel : and here interest is the sole reason of his remembering more correctly than his neighbour.

“ I once heard a person quaintly ask another. How many trees there are in St. Paul's churchyard ? The question itself indicates

that many cannot answer it ; and this is found to be the case with those who have passed the church a hundred times : whilst the cause is, that every individual in the busy stream which glides past St. Paul's is engrossed in various other interests.

“ How often does it happen that we enter a well-known apartment, or meet a well-known friend, and receive some vague idea of visible difference, but cannot possibly find out *what* it is : until at length we come to perceive (or perhaps must be told) that some ornament or furniture is removed, altered, or added in the apartment ; or that our friend has cut his hair, taken a wig, or has made any of twenty considerable alterations in his appearance. At other times, we have no perception of alteration whatever, though the like has taken place.

“ It is, however, certain, that sight, appo-  
sited with interest, can retain tolerably exact copies of sensations, especially if not too complex ; such as of the human countenance and figure. Yet the voice will convince us, when the countenance will not ; and he is reckoned an excellent painter, and no or-

dinary genius, who can make a tolerable likeness from memory. Nay, more, it is a conspicuous proof of the inaccuracy of visual ideas, that it is an effort of consummate art, attained by many years' practice, to take a strict likeness of the human countenance, even when the object is present; and among those cases, where the wilful cheat of flattery has been avoided, we still find in how very few instances the best painters produce a likeness up to the life, though practice and interest join in the attempt.

“I imagine an ordinary person would find it very difficult, supposing he had some knowledge of drawing, to afford, from memory, a tolerable sketch of such a familiar object as his curtain, his carpet, or his dressing-gown, if the pattern of either be at all various or irregular; yet he will instantly tell, with precision, either if his snuff or his wine has not the same character it had yesterday, though both these are compounds.

“Beyond all this I may observe, that a draper, who is in the daily habit of such comparisons, cannot carry in his mind the part-

cular shade of a colour during a second of time; and has no certainty of tolerably matching two simple colours, except by placing the patterns in contact."—*Essay on Consciousness*, p. 303.

I will conclude the subject of this Essay with observing, that a nearer and more familiar acquaintance with persons has a different and more favourable effect than that with places or things. The latter improve by being removed to a distance, for we have no interest in *backbiting* them: the former gain by being brought nearer and more home to us, and thus stripped of artful and illnatured misrepresentations. Report or imagination very seldom raises any individual so high in our estimation as to disappoint us greatly when we are introduced to him: prejudice and malice constantly exaggerate defects beyond the reality. Ignorance alone makes monsters or bugbears: our actual acquaintances are all very common-place people. The thing is, that as a matter of hearsay or conjecture, we make abstractions of particular vices, and irritate ourselves against some particular quality or

action of the person we dislike :—whereas individuals are concrete existences, not arbitrary denominations or nicknames; and have innumerable other qualities, good, bad, and indifferent, besides the damning feature with which we fill up the portrait or caricature in our previous fancies. We can scarcely hate any one that we know. An acute observer complained, that if there was any one to whom he had a particular spite, and a wish to let him see it, the moment he came to sit down with him, his enmity was disarmed by some unforeseen circumstance. If it was a Quarterly Reviewer, he was in other respects like any other man. Suppose, again, your adversary turns out a very ugly man, or wants an eye, you are baulked in that way :—he is not what you expected, the object of your abstract hatred and implacable disgust. He may be a very disagreeable person, but he is no longer the same. If you come into a room where a man is, you find, in general, that he has a nose upon his face. “There’s sympathy!” This alone is a diversion to your unqualified contempt. He is stupid, and says nothing, but

he seems to have something in him when he laughs. You had conceived of him as a rank Whig or Tory—yet he talks upon other subjects. You knew that he was a virulent party-writer; but you find that the man himself is a tame sort of animal enough. He does not bite. That's something. In short, you can make nothing of it. Even opposite vices balance one another. A man may be pert in company, but he is also dull; so that you cannot, though you try, hate him cordially. merely for the wish to be offensive. He is a knave. Granted. You learn, on a nearer acquaintance, what you did not know before—that he is a fool as well; so you forgive him. On the other hand, he may be a profligate public character, and may make no secret of it; but he gives you a hearty shake by the hand, speaks kindly to servants, and supports an aged father and mother. Politics apart, he is a very honest fellow. You are told that a person has carbuncles on his face; but you have ocular proofs that he is sallow, and pale as a ghost. This does not much mend the matter; but it blunts the edge of the ridi-



cule, and turns your indignation against the inventor of the lie ; but he is——, the editor of a Scotch Magazine ; so you are just where you were. I am not very fond of anonymous criticism ; I want to know who the author can be : but the moment I learn this, I am satisfied. Even —— would do well to come out of his disguise. It is the mask only that we dread and hate : the man may have something human about him ! The notions, in short, which we entertain of people at a distance, or from partial representations, or from guess-work, are simple, uncompounded ideas, which answer to nothing in reality : those which we derive from experience are mixed modes, the only true, and, in general, the most favourable ones. Instead of naked deformity, or abstract perfection——

“Those faultless monsters which the world ne’er saw”——

“ the web of our lives is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together : our virtues would be proud, if our faults whipt them not ; and our vices would despair, if they were not encouraged by our virtues.” This was truly and

finely said long ago, by one who knew the strong and weak points of human nature : but it is what sects and parties and those philosophers whose pride and boast it is to classify by nicknames, have yet to learn the meaning of!

## ESSAY X.

### ON CORPORATE BODIES.

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CORPORATE bodies are more corrupt and profligate than individuals, because they have more power to do mischief, and are less amenable to disgrace or punishment. They feel neither shame, remorse, gratitude, nor goodwill. The principle of private or natural conscience is extinguished in each individual (we have no moral sense in the breasts of others), and nothing is considered but how the united efforts of the whole (released from idle scruples) may be best directed to the obtaining of political advantages or privileges to be shared as common spoil. Each member reaps the benefit, and lays the blame, if there is any, upon the rest. The *esprit de corps* becomes the ruling passion of every corporate body, compared with which the

mótives of delicacy or decorum towards others are looked upon as being both impertinent and improper. If any person sets up a plea of this sort in opposition to the rest, he is over-ruled, he gets ill-blood, and does no good : he is regarded as an interloper, a *black sheep* in the flock, and is either *sent to Coventry*, or obliged to acquiesce in the notions and wishes of those he associates and is expected to co-operate with. The refinements of private judgment are submitted to and negatived by a committee of the whole body, while the projects and interests of the Corporation meet with a secret but powerful support in the self-love of the different members. Remonstrance—opposition is fruitless, troublesome, invidious : it answers no one end : and a conformity to the sense of the company is found to be no less necessary to a reputation for good-fellowship than to a quiet life. “ Self-love and social” here look like the same ; and in consulting the interests of a particular class, which are also your own, there is even a shew of public virtue. He who is a captious, impracticable, dissatis-

fied member of his little club or *coterie*, is immediately set down as a bad member of the community in general, as no friend to regularity and order, "a pestilent fellow," and one who is incapable of sympathy, attachment, or cordial co-operation in any department or undertaking. Thus the most refractory novice in such matters becomes weaned from his obligations to the larger society, which only breed him inconvenience without any adequate recompense, and wedded to a nearer and dearer one, where he finds every kind of comfort and consolation. He contracts the vague and unmeaning character of Man into the more emphatic title of Freeman and Alderman. The claims of an undefined humanity sit looser and looser upon him, at the same time that he draws the bands of his new engagements closer and tighter about him. He loses sight, by degrees, of all common sense and feeling in the petty squabbles, intrigues, feuds, and airs of affected importance, to which he has made himself an accessory. He is quite an altered man. "Really the society were under

considerable obligations to him in that last business ;” that is to say, in some paltry job or under-hand attempt to encroach upon the rights, or dictate to the understandings of the neighbourhood. In the mean time, they eat, drink, and carouse together. They wash down all minor animosities and unavoidable differences of opinion in pint-bumpers ; and the complaints of the multitude are lost in the clatter of plates and the roaring of loyal catches at every quarter’s meeting or mayor’s feast. The town-hall reels with an unwieldy sense of self-importance : “ the very stones prate ” of processions : the common pump creaks in concert with the uncorking of bottles and tapping of beer-barrels : the market-cross looks big with authority. Every thing has an ambiguous, upstart, repulsive air. Circle within circle is formed, an *imperium in imperio* : and the business is to exclude from the first circle all the notions, opinions, ideas, interests, and pretensions of the second. Hence there arises not only an antipathy to common sense and decency in those things where there is a real opposition of in-

terest or clashing of prejudice, but it becomes a habit and a favourite amusement in those who are "dressed in a little brief authority," to thwart, annoy, insult, and harass others on all occasions where the least opportunity or pretext for it occurs. Spite, bickerings, back-biting, insinuations, lies, jealousies, nick-names are the order of the day, and nobody knows what it is all about. One would think that the mayor, aldermen, and liverymen were a higher and more select species of animals than their townsmen; though there is no difference whatever, but in their gowns and staff of office! This is the essence of the *esprit de corps*. It is certainly not a very delectable source of contemplation or subject to treat of.

Public bodies are so far worse than the individuals composing them, because the *official* takes place of the *moral sense*. The nerves that in themselves were soft and pliable enough, and responded naturally to the touch of pity, when fastened into a machine of that sort, become callous and rigid, and throw off every extraneous application that can be

made to them with perfect apathy. An appeal is made to the ties of individual friendship: the body in general know nothing of them. A case has occurred which strongly called forth the compassion of the person who was witness of it: but the body (or any special deputation of them) were not present when it happened. These little weaknesses and “compunctious visitings of nature” are effectually guarded against, indeed, by the very rules and regulations of the society, as well as by its spirit. The individual is the creature of his feelings of all sorts, the sport of his vices and his virtues—like the fool in Shakespear, “motley’s his proper wear:”—corporate bodies are dressed in a moral uniform; mixed motives do not operate there, frailty is made into a system, “diseases are turned into commodities.” Only so much of any one’s natural or genuine impulses can influence him in his artificial capacity as formally comes home to the aggregate conscience of those with whom he acts, or bears upon the interests (real or pretended), the importance, respectability, and professed objects of the



society. Beyond that point the nerve is bound up, the conscience is seared, and the torpedo-touch of so much inert matter operates to deaden the best feelings and harden the heart. Laughter and tears are said to be the characteristic signs of humanity. Laughter is common enough in such places as a set-off to the mock-gravity : but who ever saw a public body in tears ? Nothing but a job or some knavery can keep them serious for ten minutes together. <sup>1</sup>

Such are the qualifications and the apprenticeship necessary to make a man tolerated, to enable him to pass as a cypher, or be admitted as a mere numerical unit, in any corporate body : to be a leader and dictator, he

<sup>1</sup> We sometimes see a whole play-house in tears. But the audience at a theatre, though a public assembly, are not a public body. They are not incorporated into a frame-work of exclusive, narrow-minded interests of their own. Each individual looks out of his own insignificance at a scene, *ideal* perhaps, and foreign to himself, but true to nature ; friends, strangers, meet on the common ground of humanity, and the tears that spring from their breasts are those which " sacred pity has engendered." They are a mixed multitude melted into sympathy by remote, imaginary events, not a combination cemented by petty views, and sordid, selfish prejudices.

must be diplomatic in impertinence, and officious in every dirty work. He must not merely conform to established prejudices; he must flatter them. He must not merely be insensible to the demands of moderation and equity; he must be loud against them. He must not simply fall in with all sorts of contemptible cabals and intrigues; he must be indefatigable in fomenting them, and setting every body together by the ears. He must not only repeat, but invent lies. He must make speeches and write hand-bills; he must be devoted to the wishes and objects of the society, its creature, its jackall, its busy-body, its mouth-piece, its prompter; he must deal in law-cases, in demurrers, in charters, in traditions, in common-places, in logic and rhetoric—in every thing but common sense and honesty. He must (in Mr. Burke's phrase) "disembowel himself of his natural entrails, and be stuffed with paltry, blurred sheets of parchment about the rights" of the privileged few. He must be a concentrated essence, a varnished, powdered representative of the vices, absurdities, hypocrisy, jealousy, pride,

and pragmatistical meanness of his party. Such a one by bustle and self-importance and puffing, by flattering one to his face, and abusing another behind his back, by lending himself to the weaknesses of some, and pampering the mischievous propensities of others, will pass for a great man in a little society.

Age does not improve the morality of public bodies. They grow more and more tenacious of their idle privileges and senseless self-consequence. They get weak and obstinate at the same time. Those, who belong to them, have all the upstart pride and pettifogging spirit of their present character ingrafted on the venerableness and superstitious sanctity of ancient institutions. They are naturally at issue, first with their neighbours, and next with their contemporaries, on all matters of common propriety and judgment. They become more attached to forms, the more obsolete they are; and the defence of every absurd and invidious distinction is a debt which (by implication) they owe to the dead as well as to the living. What might once have been of serious practical utility they

turn to farce, by retaining the letter when the spirit is gone : and they do this the more, the more glaring the inconsistency and want of sound reasoning; for they think they thus give proof of their zeal and attachment to the abstract principle on which old establishments exist, the ground of prescription and authority. *The greater the wrong, the greater the right*, in all such cases. The *esprit de corps* does not take much merit to itself for upholding what is justifiable in any system or in the proceedings of any party, but for adhering to what is palpably injurious. You may exact the first from an enemy : the last is the province of a friend. It has been made a subject of complaint, that the champions of the Church, for example, who are advanced to dignities and honours, are hardly ever those who defend the common principles of Christianity, but those who volunteer to man the out-works, and set up ingenious excuses for the questionable points, the ticklish places in the established form of worship, that is, for those which are attacked from without, and are supposed in danger of being

undermined by stratagem, or carried by assault !

The great resorts and seats of learning often outlive in this way the intention of the founders, as the world outgrows them. They may be said to resemble antiquated coquets of the last age, who think every thing ridiculous and intolerable that was not in fashion when they were young, and yet are standing proofs of the progress of taste and the vanity of human pretensions. Our universities are, in a great measure, become cisterns to hold, not conduits to disperse knowledge. The age has the start of them ; that is, other sources of knowledge have been opened since their formation, to which the world have had access, and have drunk plentifully at those living fountains, but from which *they* are debarred by the tenor of their charter, and as a matter of dignity and privilege. They have grown poor, like the old grandees in some countries, by subsisting on the inheritance of learning, while the people have grown rich by trade. They are too much in the nature of *fixtures* in intellect : they stop the way in the road to truth ; or at any

rate (for they do not themselves advance) they can only be of service as a check-weight on the too hasty and rapid career of innovation. All that has been invented or thought in the last two hundred years they take no cognisance of, or as little as possible; they are above it; they stand upon the ancient land-marks, and will not budge; whatever was not known when they were first endowed, they are still in profound and lofty ignorance of. Yet in that period how much has been done in literature, arts, and science, of which (with the exception of mathematical knowledge, the hardest to gainsay or subject to the trammels of prejudice and barbarous *ipse dixits*) scarce any trace is to be found in the authentic modes of study and legitimate inquiry, which prevail at either of our Universities! The unavoidable aim of all corporate bodies of learning is not to grow wise, or teach others wisdom, but to prevent any one else from being or seeming wiser than themselves; in other words, their infallible tendency is in the end to suppress inquiry and darken knowledge, by setting limits to the mind of man, and saying to his

proud spirit, *Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther!* It would not be an unedifying experiment to make a collection of the titles of works published in the course of the year by Members of the Universities. If any attempt is to be made to patch up an idle system in policy or legislation or church-government, it is by a Member of the University : if any hashed-up speculation on an old exploded argument is to be brought forward “in spite of *shame*, in erring reason’s spite,” it is by a Member of the University : if a paltry project is ushered into the world for combining ancient prejudices with modern time-serving, it is by a Member of the University. Thus we get at a stated supply of annual Defences of the Sinking Fund, Thoughts on the Evils of Education, Treatises on Predestination, and Eulogies on Mr. Malthus, all from the same source, and through the same vent. If they came from any other quarter, nobody would look at them; but they have an *Imprimatur* from dulness and authority : we know that there is no offence in them ; and they are stuck in the shop-windows, and read (in the intervals of Lord

Byron's works, or the Scotch Novels) in cathedral towns and close boroughs!

It is, I understand and believe, pretty much the same in more modern institutions for the encouragement of the Fine Arts. The end is lost in the means : rules take place of nature and genius ; cabal and bustle and struggles for rank and precedence supersede the study and the love of art. A Royal Academy is a kind of hospital and infirmary for the obliquities of taste and ingenuity—a receptacle where enthusiasm and originality stop and stagnate, and spread their influence no farther, instead of being a school founded for genius, or a temple built to fame. The generality of those who wriggle, or fawn, or beg their way to a seat there, live on their certificate of merit to a good old age, and are seldom heard of afterwards. If a man of sterling capacity gets among them, and minds his own business, he is nobody ; he makes no figure in council, in voting, in resolutions, or speeches. If he comes forward with plans and views for the good of the Academy and the advancement of art, he is immediately set upon as a visionary,



a fanatic, with notions hostile to the interest and credit of the existing members of the society. If he directs the ambition of the scholars to the study of History, this strikes at once at the emoluments of the profession, who are most of them (by God's will) portrait-painters. If he eulogises the Antique, and speaks highly of the Old Masters, he is supposed to be actuated by envy to living painters and native talent. If, again, he insists on a knowledge of anatomy as essential to correct drawing, this would seem to imply a want of it in our most eminent designers. Every plan, suggestion, argument, that has the general purposes and principles of art for its object, is thwarted, scouted, ridiculed, slandered, as bearing a malignant aspect towards the profits and pretensions of the great mass of flourishing and respectable artists in the country. This leads to irritation and ill-will on all sides. The obstinacy of the constituted authorities keeps pace with the violence and extravagance opposed to it; and they lay all the blame on the folly and mistakes they have themselves occasioned or increased. It is considered as a

personal quarrel, not a public question; by which means the dignity of the body is implicated in resenting the slips and inadvertencies of its members, not in promoting their common and declared objects. In this sort of wretched *tracasserie* the Barrys and H——s stand no chance with the Catons, the Tubbs, and the F——s. Sir Joshua even was obliged to hold himself aloof from them, and Fuseli passes as a kind of nondescript, or one of his own grotesques. The air of an Academy, in short, is not the air of genius and immortality; it is too close and heated, and impregnated with the notions of the common sort. A man steeped in a corrupt atmosphere of this description is no longer open to the genial impulses of nature and truth, nor sees visions of ideal beauty, nor dreams of antique grace and grandeur, nor has the finest works of art continually hovering and floating through his uplifted fancy; but the images that haunt it are rules of the academy, charters, inaugural speeches, resolutions passed or rescinded, cards of invitation to a council-meeting, or the annual dinner, prize-medals, and the king's

diploma, constituting him a gentleman and esquire. He “wipes out all trivial, fond records;” all romantic aspirations; “the Raphael grace, the Guido air;” and the commands of the Academy alone “must live within the book and volume of his brain, unmixed with baser matter.” It may be doubted whether any work of lasting reputation and universal interest can spring up in this soil, or ever has done in that of any Academy. The last question is a matter of fact and history, not of mere opinion or prejudice; and may be ascertained as such accordingly. The mighty names of former times rose before the existence of Academies; and the three greatest painters, undoubtedly, that this country has produced, Reynolds, Wilson, and Hogarth, were not “dandled and swaddled” into artists in any institution for the Fine Arts. I do not apprehend that the names of Chantry or Wilkie (great as one, and considerable as the other of them is) can be made use of in any way to impugn the jet of this argument. We may find a considerable improvement in some of our artists, when they get out of the vortex for a time. Sir

Thomas Lawrence is all the better for having been abstracted for a year or two from Somerset-House ; and Mr. D——, they say, has been doing wonders in the North. When will he return, and once more “bid Britannia rival Greece ?” —

Mr. Canning somewhere lays it down as a rule, that corporate bodies are necessarily correct and pure in their conduct, from the knowledge which the individuals composing them have of one another, and the jealous vigilance they exercise over each other's motives and characters ; whereas people collected into mobs are disorderly and unprincipled from being utterly unknown and unaccountable to each other. This is a curious *pass of wit*. I differ with him in both parts of the dilemma. To begin with the first, and to handle it somewhat cavalierly, according to the model before us : we know, for instance, there is said to be honour among thieves, but very little honesty towards others. Their honour consists in the division of the booty, not in the mode of acquiring it : they do not (often) betray one another, but they will waylay a

stranger, or knock out a traveller's brains : they may be depended on in giving the alarm when any of their posts are in danger of being surprised ; and they will stand together for their ill-gotten gains to the last drop of their blood. Yet they form a distinct society, and are strictly responsible for their behaviour to one another and to their leader. They are not a mob, but a *gang*, completely in one another's power and secrets. Their familiarity, however, with the proceedings of the *corps* does not lead them to expect or to exact from it a very high standard of moral honesty ; that is out of the question ; but they are sure to gain the good opinion of their fellows by committing all sorts of depredations, fraud, and violence against the community at large. So (not to speak it profanely) some of Mr. C——'s friends may be very respectable people in their way—"all honourable men"—but their respectability is confined within party-limits ; every one does not sympathise in the integrity of their views ; the understanding between them and the public is not well-defined or reciprocal. Or, suppose a gang of pick-pockets

hustle a passenger in the street, and the mob set upon them, and proceed to execute summary justice upon such as they can lay hands on, am I to conclude that the rogues are in the right, because theirs is a system of well-organised knavery, which they settled in the morning, with their eyes one upon the other, and which they regularly canvass at night, with a due estimate of each other's motives, character, and conduct in the business; and that the honest men are in the wrong, because they are a casual collection of unprejudiced, disinterested individuals, taken at a venture from the mass of the people, acting without concert or responsibility, on the spur of the occasion, and giving way to their instantaneous impulses and honest anger? Mobs in fact, then, are almost always right in their feelings, and often in their judgments, on this very account—that being utterly unknown to and disconnected with each other, they have no point of union or principle of co-operation between them, but the natural sense of justice recognised by all persons in common. They appeal, at the first meeting, not to certain symbols and

watch-words privately agreed upon, like Freemasons, but to the maxims and instincts proper to them as men. They have no other clue to guide them to their object but either the dictates of the heart, or the universally understood sentiments of society, neither of which are likely to be in the wrong. The flame, which bursts out and blazes from popular sympathy, is made of honest, but homely materials. It is not kindled by sparks of wit or sophistry, nor damped by the cold calculations of self-interest. The multitude may be wantonly set on by others, as is too often the case, or be carried too far in the impulse of rage and disappointment; but their resentment, when they are left to themselves, is almost uniformly, in the first instance, excited by some evident abuse and wrong; and the excesses into which they run arise from that very want of foresight and regular system, which is a pledge of the uprightness and heartiness of their intentions. In short, the only class of persons to whom the above courtly charge of sinister and corrupt motives is not applicable, is that body of individuals which usually goes by the name of the *People!*

## ESSAY XI.

### ON THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHARACTER.

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It is astonishing, with all our opportunities and practice, how little we know of this subject. For myself, I feel that the more I learn, the less I understand it.

I remember, several years ago, a conversation in the *Diligence* coming from Paris, in which, on its being mentioned that a man had married his wife after thirteen years' courtship, a fellow-countryman of mine observed, that "then, at least, he would be acquainted with her character;" when a Monsieur P——, inventor and proprietor of the *Invisible Girl*, made answer, "No, not at all; for that the very next day she might turn out the very reverse of the character that she had appeared in during all the preceding



time.”<sup>1</sup> I could not help admiring the superior sagacity of the French juggler, and it struck me then that we could never be sure when we had got at the bottom of this riddle.

There are various ways of getting at a knowledge of character—by looks, words, actions. The first of these, which seems the most superficial, is perhaps the safest, and least liable to deceive: nay, it is that which mankind, in spite of their pretending to the contrary, are generally governed by. Professions pass for nothing, and actions may be counterfeited: but a man cannot help his looks. “Speech,” said a celebrated wit, “was given to man to conceal his thoughts.” Yet I do not know that the greatest hypocrites are the least silent. The mouth of Cromwell is pursued up in the portraits of him, as if he was afraid to trust himself with words. Lord Chesterfield advises us, if we wish to know the real sentiments of the person we are conversing with, to look in his face, for he can more easily command his words than his

<sup>1</sup> “It is not a year or two shews us a man.”—EMILIA, in *OTHELLO*.

features.' A man's whole life may be a lie to himself and others : and yet a picture painted of him by a great artist would probably stamp his true character on the canvas, and betray the secret to posterity. Men's opinions were divided, in their life-time, about such prominent personages as Charles V, and Ignatius Loyola, partly, no doubt, from passion and interest, but partly from contradictory evidence in their ostensible conduct : the spectator, who has ever seen their pictures by Titian, judges of them at once, and truly. I had rather leave a good portrait of myself behind me than have a fine epitaph. The face, for the most part, tells what we have thought and felt—the rest is nothing. I have a higher idea of Donne from a rude, half-effaced outline of him prefixed to his poems than from any thing he ever wrote. Cæsar's Commentaries would not have redeemed him in my opinion, if the bust of him had resembled the Duke of W——. My old friend, Fawcett, used to say, that if Sir Isaac Newton himself had lisped, he could not have thought any thing of him. So I cannot persuade myself

that any one is a great man, who looks like a blockhead. In this I may be wrong.

First impressions are often the truest, as we find (not unfrequently) to our cost, when we have been wheedled out of them by plausible professions or studied actions. A man's look is the work of years, it is stamped on his countenance by the events of his whole life, nay more, by the hand of nature, and it is not to be got rid of easily. There is, as it has been remarked repeatedly, something in a person's appearance at first sight which we do not like, and that gives us an odd twinge, but which is overlooked in a multiplicity of other circumstances, till the mask is taken off, and we see this lurking character verified in the plainest manner in the sequel. We are struck at first, and by chance, with what is peculiar and characteristic; also with permanent *traits* and general effect: these afterwards go off in a set of unmeaning, common-place details. This sort of *prima facie* evidence, then, shews what a man is, better than what he says or does; for it shews us the habit of his mind, which is the same under all circumstances and

disguises. You will say, on the other hand, ~~that~~ there is no judging by appearances, as a general rule. No one, for instance, would take such a person for a very clever man without knowing who he was. Then, ten to one, he is not : he may have got the reputation, but it is a mistake. You say, there is Mr. ———, undoubtedly a person of great genius : yet, except when excited by something extraordinary, he seems half dead. He has wit at will, yet wants life and spirit. He is capable of the most generous acts, yet meanness seems to cling to every motion. He looks like a poor creature—and in truth he is one ! The first impression he gives you of him answers nearly to the feeling he has of his personal identity ; and this image of himself, rising from his thoughts, and shrouding his faculties, is that which sits with him in the house, walks out with him into the street, and haunts his bed-side. The best part of his existence is dull, cloudy, leaden : the flashes of light that proceed from it, or streak it here and there, may dazzle others, but do not deceive himself. Modesty is the lowest of

the virtues, and is a real confession of the deficiency it indicates. He who undervalues himself is justly undervalued by others. Whatever good properties he may possess are, in fact, neutralised by a "cold rheum" running through his veins, and taking away the zest of his pretensions, the pith and marrow of his performances. What is it to me that I can write these TABLE-TALKS? It is true I can, by a reluctant effort, rake up a parcel of half-forgotten observations, but they do not float on the surface of my mind, nor stir it with any sense of pleasure, nor even of pride. Others have more property in them than I have: *they* may reap the benefit, *I* have only had the pain. Otherwise, they are to me as if they had never existed: nor should I know that I had ever thought at all, but that I am reminded of it by the strangeness of my appearance, and my unfitness for every thing else. Look in C——'s face while he is talking. His words are such as might "create a soul under the ribs of death." His face is a blank. Which are we to consider as the true index of his mind? Pain, languor, shadowy

remembrances are the uneasy inmates there: his lips move mechanically!

There are people whom we do not like, though we may have known them long, and have no fault to find with them, except that their appearance is so much against them. That is not all, if we could find it out. There is, generally, a reason for this prejudice; for nature is true to itself. They may be very good sort of people, too, in their way, but still something is the matter. There is a coldness, a selfishness, a levity, an insincerity, which we cannot fix upon any particular phrase or action, but we see it in their whole persons and deportment. One reason that we do not see it in any other way may be, that they are all the time trying to conceal this defect by every means in their power. There is, luckily, a sort of *second-sight* in morals: we discern the lurking indications of temper and habit a long while before their palpable effects appear. I once used to meet with a person at an ordinary, a very civil, good-looking man in other respects, but with an odd look about his eyes, which I could not explain, as if he

saw you under their fringed lids, and you could not see him again : this man was a common sharper. The greatest hypocrite I ever knew was a little, demure, pretty, modest-looking girl, with eyes timidly cast upon the ground, and an air soft as enchantment; the only circumstance that could lead to a suspicion of her true character was a cold, sullen, watery, glazed look about the eyes, which she bent on vacancy, as if determined to avoid all explanation with yours. I might have spied in their glittering, motionless surface, the rocks and quicksands that awaited me below ! We do not feel quite at ease in the company or friendship of those who have any natural obliquity or imperfection of person. The reason is, they are not on the best terms with themselves, and are sometimes apt to play off on others the tricks that nature has played them. This, however, is a remark that, perhaps, ought not to have been made. I know a person to whom it has been objected as a disqualification for friendship, that he never shakes you cordially by the hand. I own this is a *damp*er to sanguine and florid

temperaments, who abound in these practical demonstrations and “compliments extern.”

The same person, who testifies the least pleasure at meeting you, is the last to quit his seat in your company, grapples with a subject in conversation right earnestly, and is, I take it, backward to give up a cause or a friend. Cold and distant in appearance, he piques himself on being the king of *good haters*, and a no less zealous partisan. The most phlegmatic constitutions often contain the most inflammable spirits—as fire is struck from the hardest flints.

And this is another reason that makes it difficult to judge of character. Extremes meet; and qualities display themselves by the most contradictory appearances. Any inclination, in consequence of being generally suppressed, vents itself the more violently when an opportunity presents itself: the greatest grossness sometimes accompanies the greatest refinement, as a natural relief, one to the other; and we find the most reserved and indifferent tempers at the beginning of an entertainment, or an acquaintance, turn out the most com-



municative and cordial at the end of it. Some spirits exhaust themselves at first : others gain strength by progression. Some minds have a greater facility of throwing off impressions, and are, as it were, more transparent or porous than others. Thus the French present a marked contrast to the English in this respect. A Frenchman addresses you at once with a sort of lively indifference : an Englishman is more on his guard, feels his way, and is either exceedingly silent, or lets you into his whole confidence, which he cannot so well impart to an entire stranger. Again, a Frenchman is naturally humane : an Englishman is, I should say, only friendly by habit. His virtues and his vices cost him more than they do his more gay and volatile neighbours. An Englishman is said to speak his mind more plainly than others :—yes, if it will give you pain to hear it. He does not care whom he offends by his discourse : a foreigner generally strives to oblige in what he says. The French are accused of promising more than they perform. That may be, and yet they may perform as many good-natured acts as the English, if the

latter are as averse to perform as they are to promise. Even the professions of the French may be sincere at the time, or arise out of the impulse of the moment; though their desire to serve you may be neither very violent nor very lasting. I cannot think, notwithstanding, that the French are not a serious people; nay, that they are not a more reflecting people than the common run of the English. Let those who think them merely light and mercurial, explain that enigma, their everlasting prosing tragedy. The English are considered as comparatively a slow, plodding people. If the French are quicker, they are also more plodding. See, for example, how highly finished and elaborate their works of art are! How systematic and correct they aim at being in all their productions of a graver cast! "If the French have a fault," as Yorick said, "it is that they are too grave." With wit, sense, cheerfulness, patience, good-nature, and refinement of manners, all they want is imagination and sturdiness of moral principle! Such are some of the contradictions in the character of the two nations, and so little does

the character of either appear to have been understood ! Nothing can be more ridiculous indeed, than the way in which we exaggerate each other's vices and extenuate our own. The whole is an affair of prejudice on one side of the question, and of partiality on the other. Travellers who set out to carry back a true report of the case appear to lose not only the use of their understandings, but of their senses, the instant they set foot in a foreign land. The commonest facts and appearances are distorted and discoloured. They go abroad with certain preconceived notions on the subject, and they make every thing answer, in reason's spite, to their favourite theory. In addition to the difficulty of explaining customs and manners foreign to our own, there are all the obstacles of wilful prepossession thrown in the way. It is not, therefore, much to be wondered at that nations have arrived at so little knowledge of one another's characters; and that, where the object has been to widen the breach between them, any slight differences that occur are easily blown into a blaze of fury by repeated

misrepresentations, and all the exaggerations that malice or folly can invent !

This ignorance of character is not confined to foreign nations : we are ignorant of that of our own countrymen in a class a little below or above ourselves. We can hardly pretend to pronounce magisterially on the good or bad qualities of strangers; and, at the same time, we are ignorant of those of our friends, of our kindred, and of our own. We are in all these cases either too near or too far off the object, to judge of it properly.

Persons, for instance, in a higher or middle rank of life know little or nothing of the characters of those below them, as servants, country-people, *etc.* I would lay it down in the first place as a general rule on this subject, that all uneducated people are hypocrites. Their sole business is to deceive. They imagine themselves in a state of hostility with others, and stratagems are fair in war. The inmates of the kitchen and the parlour are always (as far as respects their feelings and intentions towards each other) in Hobbes's "state of nature." Servants and

others in that line of life have nothing to exercise their spare talents for invention upon but those about them. Their superfluous electrical particles of wit and fancy are not carried off by those established and fashionable conductors, novels and romances. Their faculties are not buried in books, but all alive and stirring, erect and bristling like a cat's back. Their coarse conversation sparkles with "wild wit, invention ever new." Their betters try all they can to set themselves up above them, and they try all they can to pull them down to their own level. They do this by getting up a little comic interlude, a daily, domestic, homely drama out of the odds and ends of the family-failings, of which there is in general a pretty plentiful supply, or make up the deficiency of materials out of their own heads. They turn the qualities of their masters and mistresses inside out, and any real kindness or condescension only sets them the more against you. They are not to be taken in in that way—they will not be baulked in the spite they have to you. They only set to work with redoubled alacrity, to lessen the

favour or to blacken your character. They feel themselves like a degraded *caste*, and cannot understand how the obligations can be all on one side, and the advantages all on the other. You cannot come to equal terms with them—they reject all such overtures as insidious and hollow—nor can you ever calculate upon their gratitude or good-will, any more than if they were so many strolling Gipsies or wild Indians. They have no fellow-feeling, they keep no faith with the more privileged classes. They are in your power, and they endeavour to be even with you by trick and cunning, by lying and chicanery. In this they have nothing to restrain them. Their whole life is a succession of shifts, excuses, and expedients. The love of truth is a principle with those only who have made it their study, who have applied themselves to the pursuit of some art or science, where the intellect is severely tasked, and learns by habit to take a pride in, and to set a just value on the correctness of its conclusions. To have a disinterested regard for truth, the mind must have contemplated it in abstract

and remote questions; whereas the ignorant and vulgar are only conversant with those things in which their own interest is concerned. All their notions are local, personal, and consequently gross and selfish. They say whatever comes uppermost—turn whatever happens to their own account—and invent any story, or give any answer that suits their purpose. Instead of being bigoted to general principles, they trump up any lie for the occasion, and the more of a *thumper* it is, the better they like it; the more unlooked-for it is, why, so much the more of a *God-send*! They have no conscience about the matter; and if you find them out in any of their manœuvres, are not ashamed of themselves, but angry with you. If you remonstrate with them, they laugh in your face. The only hold you have of them is their interest—you can but dismiss them from your employment; and *service is no inheritance*. If they affect any thing like decent remorse, and hope you will pass it over, all the while they are probably trying to recover the wind of you. Persons of liberal knowledge or sentiments

have no kind of chance in this sort of mixed intercourse with these barbarians in civilised life. You cannot tell, by any signs or principles, what is passing in their minds. There is no common point of view between you. You have not the same topics to refer to, the same language to express yourself. Your interests, your feelings are quite distinct. You take certain things for granted as rules of action : they take nothing for granted but their own ends, pick up all their knowledge out of their own occasions, are on the watch only for what they can catch—are

“ Subtle as the fox for prey :  
Like warlike as the wolf, for what they eat.”

They have indeed a regard to their character, as this last may affect their livelihood or advancement, none as it is connected with a sense of propriety ; and this sets their mother-wit and native talents at work upon a double file of expedients, to bilk their consciences, and salve their reputation. In short, you never know where to have them, any more than if they were a different species



of animals ; and in trusting to them, you are sure to be betrayed and over-reached. You have other things to mind, they are thinking only of you, and how to turn you to advantage. *Give and take* is no maxim here. You can build nothing on your own moderation or on their false delicacy. After a familiar conversation with a waiter at a tavern, you overhear him calling you by some provoking nickname. If you make a present to the daughter of the house where you lodge, the mother is sure to recollect some addition to her bill. It is a running fight. In fact, there is a principle in human nature not willingly to endure the idea of a superior, a sour jacobinical disposition to wipe out the score of obligation, or efface the tinsel of external advantages—and where others have the opportunity of coming in contact with us, they generally find the means to establish a sufficiently marked degree of degrading equality. No man is a hero to his valet-de-chambre, is an old maxim. A new illustration of this principle occurred the other day. While Mrs. Siddons was giving her readings of Shake-

'spear to a brilliant and admiring drawing-room, one of the servants in the hall below was saying, "What, I find the old lady is making as much noise as ever!" So little is there in common between the different classes of society, and so impossible is it ever to reconcile the diversities of custom and knowledge which separate them.

Women, according to Mrs. Peachum, are "bitter bad judges" of the characters of men; and men are not much better of theirs, if we can form any guess from their choice in marriage. Love is proverbially blind. The whole is an affair of whim and fancy. Certain it is, that the greatest favourites with the other sex are not those who are most liked or respected among their own. I never knew but one clever man who was what is called a *lady's man*; and he (unfortunately for the argument) happened to be a considerable coxcomb. It was by this irresistible quality, and not by the force of his genius, that he vanquished. Women seem to doubt their own judgments in love, and to take the opinion which a man entertains of his own prowess

and accomplishments for granted. The wives of poets are (for the most part) mere pieces of furniture in the room. If you speak to them of their husbands' talents or reputation in the world, it is as if you made mention of some office that they held. It can hardly be otherwise, when the instant any subject is started or conversation arises, in which men take an interest, or try one another's strength, the women leave the room, or attend to something else. The qualities then in which men are ambitious to excel, and which ensure the applause of the world, eloquence, genius, learning, integrity, are not those which gain the favour of the fair. I must not deny, however, that wit and courage have this effect. Neither is youth or beauty the sole passport to their affections. '

"The way of woman's will is hard to know,  
Harder to hit."

Yet there is some clue to this mystery, some determining cause; for we find that the same men are universal favourites with women, as others are uniformly disliked by them. Is

not the load-stone that attracts so powerfully, and in all circumstances, a strong and undisguised bias towards them, a marked attention, a conscious preference of them to every other passing object or topic? I am not sure, but I incline to think so. The successful lover is the *cavalier servente* of all nations. The man of gallantry behaves as if he had made an assignation with every woman he addresses. An argument immediately draws off the scholar's attention from the prettiest woman in the room. He accordingly succeeds better in argument—than in love!—I do not think that what is called *Love at first sight* is so great an absurdity as it is sometimes imagined to be. We generally make up our minds beforehand to the sort of person we should like, grave or gay, black, brown, or fair; with golden tresses or with raven locks;—and when we meet with a complete example of the qualities we admire, the bargain is soon struck. We have never seen any thing to come up to our newly discovered Goddess before, but she is what we have been all our lives looking for. The idol we fall down

and worship is an image familiar to our minds. It has been present to our waking thoughts, it has haunted us in our dreams, like some fairy vision. Oh! thou, who, the first time I ever beheld thee, didst draw my soul into the circle of thy heavenly looks, and wave enchantment round me, do not think thy conquest less complete because it was instantaneous; for in that gentle form (as if another Imogen had entered) I saw all that I had ever loved of female grace, modesty, and sweetness!

I cannot say much of friendship as giving an insight into character, because it is often founded on mutual infirmities and prejudices. Friendships are frequently taken up on some sudden sympathy, and we see only as much as we please of one another's characters afterwards. Intimate friends are not fair witnesses to character, any more than professed enemies. They cool, indeed, in time—part, and retain only a rankling grudge at past errors and oversights. Their testimony in the latter case is not quite free from suspicion.

One would think that near relations, who live constantly together, and always have done so, must be pretty well acquainted with one another's character. They are nearly in the dark about it. Familiarity confounds all traits of distinction : interest and prejudice take away the power of judging. We have no opinion on the subject, any more than of one another's faces. The Penates, the household-Gods, are veiled. We do not see the features of those we love, nor do we clearly discern their virtues or their vices. We take them as they are found in the lump:—by weight, and not by measure. We know all about the individuals, their sentiments, history, manners, words, actions, every thing : but we know all these too much as facts, as inveterate, habitual impressions, as clothed with too many associations, as sanctified with too many affections, as woven too much into the web of our hearts, to be able to pick out the different threads, to cast up the items of the debtor and creditor account, or to refer them to any general standard of right and wrong. Our impressions with respect to them

are too strong, too real, too much *sui generis*, to be capable of a comparison with any thing but themselves. We hardly inquire whether those for whom we are thus interested, and to whom we are thus knit, are *better* or *worse* than others—the question is a kind of profanation—all we know is, they are *more* to us than any one else can be. Our sentiments of this kind are rooted and grow in us, and we cannot eradicate them by voluntary means. Besides, our judgments are bespoke, our interests take part with our blood. If any doubt arises, if the veil of our implicit confidence is drawn aside by any accident for a moment, the shock is too great, like that of a dislocated limb, and we recoil on our habitual impressions again. Let not that veil ever be rent entirely asunder, so that those images may be left bare of reverential awe, and lose their religion: for nothing can ever support the desolation of the heart afterwards!

The greatest misfortune that can happen among relations is a different way of bringing up, so as to set one another's opinions and characters in an entirely new point of view. This

often lets in an unwelcome day-light on the subject, and breeds schisms, coldness, and incurable heart-burnings in families. I have sometimes thought whether the progress of society and march of knowledge does not do more harm in this respect, by loosening the ties of domestic attachment, and preventing those who are most interested in, and anxious to think well of one another, from feeling a cordial sympathy and approbation of each other's sentiments, manners, views, *etc.* than it does good by any real advantage to the community at large. The son, for instance, is brought up to the church, and nothing can exceed the pride and pleasure the father takes in him, while all goes on well in this favourite direction. His notions change, and he imbibes a taste for the Fine Arts. From this moment there is an end of any thing like the same unreserved communication between them. The young man may talk with enthusiasm of his "Rembrandts, Correggios, and stuff:" it is all *Hebrew* to the elder; and whatever satisfaction he may feel in hearing of his son's progress, or good wishes for his



success, he is never reconciled to the new pursuit, he still hankers after the first object that he had set his mind upon. Again, the grandfather is a Calvinist, who never gets the better of his disappointment at his son's going over to the Unitarian side of the question. The matter rests here, till the grandson, some years after, in the fashion of the day and "infinite agitation of men's wit," comes to doubt certain points in the creed in which he has been brought up, and the affair is all abroad again. Here are three generations made uncomfortable and in a manner set at variance, by a veering point of theology, and the officious meddling of biblical critics! Nothing, on the other hand, can be more wretched or common than that upstart pride and insolent good fortune which is ashamed of its origin; nor are there many things more awkward than the situation of rich and poor relations. Happy, much happier, are those tribes and people who are confined to the same *caste* and way of life from sire to son, where prejudices are transmitted like instincts, and where the same unvarying standard of opinion and refinement

blend countless generations in its improgressive, everlasting mould!

Not only is there a wilful and habitual blindness in near kindred to each other's defects, but an incapacity to judge from the quantity of materials, from the contradictoriness of the evidence. The chain of particulars is too long and massy for us to lift it or put it into the most approved ethical scales. The concrete result does not answer to any abstract theory, to any logical definition. There is black and white and grey, square and round—there are too many anomalies, too many redeeming points in poor human nature, such as it actually is, for us to arrive at a smart, summary decision on it. We know too much to come to any hasty or partial conclusion. We do not pronounce upon the present act, because a hundred others rise up to contradict it. We suspend our judgments altogether, because in effect one thing unconsciously balances another; and perhaps this obstinate, pertinacious indecision would be the truest philosophy in other cases, where we dispose of the question of character easily, because we have only the

smallest part of the evidence to decide upon. Real character is not one thing, but a thousand things; actual qualities do not conform to any factitious standard in the mind, but rest upon their own truth and nature. The dull stupor under which we labour in respect of those whom we have the greatest opportunities of inspecting nearly, we should do well to imitate, before we give extreme and uncharitable verdicts against those whom we only see in passing, or at a distance. If we knew them better, we should be disposed to say less about them.

In the truth of things, there are none utterly worthless, none without some drawback on their pretensions, or some alloy of imperfection. It has been observed that a familiarity with the worst characters lessens our abhorrence of them; and a wonder is often expressed that the greatest criminals look like other men. The reason is that *they are like other men in many respects*. If a particular individual was merely the wretch we read of or conceive in the abstract, that is, if he was the mere personified idea of the criminal brought

to the bar, he would not disappoint the spectator, but would look like what he would be—a monster! But he has other qualities, ideas, feelings, nay, probably virtues, mixed up with the most profligate habits or desperate acts. This need not lessen our abhorrence of the crime, though it does of the criminal; for it has the latter effect only by shewing him to us in different points of view, in which he appears a common mortal, and not the caricature of vice we took him for, nor spotted all over with infamy. I do not at the same time think this a lax or dangerous, though it is a charitable view of the subject. In my opinion, no man ever answered in his own mind (except in the agonies of conscience or of repentance, in which latter case he throws the imputation from himself in another way) to the abstract idea of a *murderer*. He may have killed a man in self-defence, or “in the trade of war,” or to save himself from starving, or in revenge for an injury, but always “so as with a difference,” or from mixed and questionable motives. The individual, in reckoning with himself, always takes into the account

the considerations of time, place, and circumstance, and never makes out a case of unmitigated, unprovoked villainy, of "pure defecated evil" against himself. There are degrees in real crimes : we reason and moralise only by names and in classes. I should be loth, indeed, to say, that "whatever is, is right : " but almost every actual choice inclines to it, with some sort of imperfect, unconscious bias. This is the reason, besides the ends of secrecy, of the invention of *slang* terms for different acts of profligacy committed by thieves, pickpockets, *etc.* The common names suggest associations of disgust in the minds of others, which those who live by them do not willingly recognise, and which they wish to sink in a technical phraseology. So there is a story of a fellow who, as he was writing down his confession of a murder, stopped to ask how the word *murder* was spelt ; this, if true, was partly because his imagination was staggered by the recollection of the thing, and partly because he shrunk from the verbal admission of it. "*Amen* stuck in his throat !" The defence made by Eugene Aram of himself

against a charge of murder some years before, shews that he in imagination completely flung from himself the *nominal* crime imputed to him : he might, indeed, have staggered an old man with a blow, and buried his body in a cave, and lived ever since upon the money he found upon him, but there was “no malice in the case, none at all,” as Peachum says. The very coolness, subtlety, and circumspection of his defence (as masterly a legal document as there is upon record) prove that he was guilty of the act, as much as they prove that he was unconscious of the *crime*<sup>1</sup>. In the same spirit, and I conceive with great metaphysical truth, Mr. Coleridge, in his tragedy of *Remorse*, makes Ordonio (his chief character) waive the acknowledgment of his meditated guilt to his own mind, by putting into his mouth that striking soliloquy :

<sup>1</sup> The bones of the murdered man were dug up in an old hermitage. On this, as one instance of the acuteness which he displayed all through the occasion, Aram remarks, “Where would you expect to find the bones of a man sooner than in a hermit’s cell, except you were to look for them in a cemetery?” See NEWGATE-CALENDAR for the year 1758 or 9.

Say, I had laid a body in the sun!  
Well ! in a month there swarm forth from the corse  
A thousand, nay, ten thousand sentient beings  
In place of that one man. Say I had *kill'd* him !  
Yet who shall tell me that each one and all  
Of these ten thousand lives is not as happy  
As that one life, which being push'd aside,  
Made room for these unnumber'd.—ACT. II. SC. II.

I am not sure, indeed, that I have not got this whole train of speculation from him ; but I should not think the worse of it on that account. That gentleman, I recollect, once asked me whether I thought that the different members of a family really liked one another so well, or had so much attachment as was generally supposed : and I said that I conceived the regard they had towards each other was expressed by the word *interest*, rather than by any other ; which he said was the true answer. I do not know that I could mend it now. Natural affection is not pleasure in one another's company, nor admiration of one another's qualities ; but it is an intimate and deep knowledge of the things that affect those, to whom we are bound by the nearest ties, with pleasure or with pain ; it is an anxious,

uneasy fellow-feeling with them, a jealous watchfulness over their good name, a tender and unconquerable yearning for their good. The love, in short, we bear them, is the nearest to that we bear ourselves. *Home*, according to the old saying, *is home, be it never so homely*. We love ourselves, not according to our deserts, but our cravings after good : so we love our immediate relations in the next degree (if not even sometimes in a higher one) because we know best what they have suffered and what sits nearest to their hearts. We are implicated, in fact, in their welfare by habit and sympathy, as we are in our own.

If our devotion to our own interests is much the same as to theirs, we are ignorant of our own characters for the same reason. We are parties too much concerned to return a fair verdict, and are too much in the secret of our own motives or situation not to be able to give a favourable turn to our actions. We exercise a liberal criticism upon ourselves, and put off the final decision to a late day. The field is large and open. Hamlet exclaims, with a



noble magnanimity, "I count myself indifferent honest, and yet I could accuse me of such things!" If you could prove to a man that he is a knave, it would not make much difference in his opinion ; his self-love is stronger than his love of virtue. Hypocrisy is generally used as a mask to deceive the world, not to impose on ourselves : for once detect the delinquent in his knavery, and he laughs in your face or glories in his iniquity. This at least happens, except where there is a contradiction in the character, and our vices are involuntary and at variance with our convictions. One great difficulty is to distinguish ostensible motives, or such as we acknowledge to ourselves, from the tacit or secret springs of action. A man changes his opinion readily, he thinks it candour : it is levity of mind. For the most part, we are stunned and stupid in judging of ourselves. We are callous by custom to our defects or excellences, unless where vanity steps in to exaggerate or extenuate them. I cannot conceive how it is that people are in love with their own persons or astonished at their own performances, which

are but a 'nine days' wonder to every one else. In general it may be laid down that we are liable to this twofold mistake in judging of our own talents : we, in the first place, nurse the rickety bantling, we think much of that which has cost us much pains and labour, and which goes against the grain; and we also set little store by what we do with most ease to ourselves, and therefore best. The works of the greatest genius are produced almost unconsciously, with an ignorance on the part of the persons themselves that they have done any thing extraordinary. Nature has done it for them. How little Shakespeare seems to have thought of himself or of his fame! Yet, if "to know another well, were to know one's self," he must have been acquainted with his own pretensions and character, "who knew all qualities with a learned spirit." His eye seems never to have been bent upon himself, but outwards upon nature. A man, who thinks highly of himself, may almost set it down that it is without reason. Milton, notwithstanding, appears to have had a high opinion of himself, and to have made it good. He was cons-

cious of his powers, and great by design. Perhaps his tenaciousness, on the score of his own merit, might arise from an early habit of polemical writing, in which his pretensions were continually called to the bar of prejudice and party-spirit, and he had to plead not guilty to the indictment. Some men have died unconscious of immortality; as others have almost exhausted the sense of it in their life-time. Correggio might be mentioned as an instance of the one, Voltaire of the other.

There is nothing that helps a man in his conduct through life more than a knowledge of his own characteristic weaknesses (which, guarded against, become his strength), as there is nothing that tends more to the success of a man's talents than his knowing the limits of his faculties, which are thus concentrated on some practicable object. One man can do but one thing. Universal pretensions end in nothing. Or, as Butler has it, too much wit requires

“As much again to govern it.”

There are those who have gone (for want of

this self-knowledge) strangely out of their way, and others who have never found it. We find many who succeed in certain departments, and are yet melancholy and dissatisfied, because they failed in the one to which they first devoted themselves, like discarded lovers who pine after their scornful mistress. I will conclude with observing, that authors in general over-rate the extent and value of posthumous fame : for what (as it has been asked) is the amount even of Shakespear's fame? That in that very country which boasts his genius and his birth, perhaps scarce one person in ten has ever heard of his name, or read a syllable of his writings!



## **TABLE-TALK.**



# **TABLE-TALK :**

OR.

## **ORIGINAL ESSAYS,**

BY WILLIAM HAZLITT.

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**VOL. II.**

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## ESSAY XII.

### ON THE FEAR OF DEATH.

---

“ And our little life is rounded with a sleep.”

PERHAPS the best cure for the fear of death is to reflect that life has a beginning as well as an end. There was a time when we were not: this gives us no concern—why then should it trouble us that a time will come when we shall cease to be? I have no wish to have been alive a hundred years ago, or in the reign of Queen Anne: why should I regret and lay it so much to heart that I shall not be alive a hundred years hence, in the reign of I cannot tell whom?

When Bickerstaff wrote his Essays, I knew nothing of the subjects of them: nay, much later, and but the other day, as it were, in the beginning of the reign of George III,

when Goldsmith, Johnson, Burke used to meet at the Globe, when Garrick was in his glory, and Reynolds was over head and ears with his portraits, and Sterne brought out the volumes of *Tristram Shandy* year by year, it was without consulting me : I had not the slightest intimation of what was going on : the debates in the House of Commons on the American war, or the firing at Bunker's Hill, disturbed not me : yet I thought this no evil—I neither ate, drank, nor was merry, yet I did not complain : I had not then looked out into this breathing world, yet I was well ; and the world did quite as well without me as I did without it ! Why then should I make all this outcry about parting with it, and being no worse off than I was before ? There is nothing in the recollection that at a certain time we were not come into the world, that ‘the gorge rises at’—why should we revolt at the idea that we must one day go out of it ? To die is only to be as we were before we were born ; yet no one feels any remorse or regret or repugnance in contemplating this last idea. It is rather a relief and dis-

burthening of the mind : it seems to have been holiday-time with us then : we were not called to appear upon the stage of life, to wear robes or tatters, to laugh or cry, be hooted or applauded ; we had lain *perdu* all this while, snug, out of harm's way ; and had slept out our thousands of centuries without wanting to be waked up ; at peace and free from care, in a long nonage, in a sleep deeper and calmer than that of infancy, wrapped in the softest and finest dust. And the worst that we dread is, after a short, fretful, feverish being, after vain hopes and idle fears, to sink to final repose again, and forget the troubled dream of life !..... Ye armed men, knights-templars, that sleep in the stone aisles of that old Temple Church, where all is silent above, and where a deeper silence reigns below (not broken by the pealing organ), are ye not contented where ye lie ? Or would you come out of your long homes to go to the Holy War ? Or do ye complain that pain no longer visits you, that sickness has done its worst, that you have paid the last debt to nature, that you hear no more of the thickening phalanx

of the foe, or your lady's waning love; and that while this ball of earth rolls its eternal round, no sound shall ever pierce through to disturb your lasting repose, fixed as the marble over your tombs, breathless as the grave that holds you! And thou, oh! thou, to whom my heart turns, and will turn while it has feeling left, who didst love in vain, and whose first was thy last sigh, wilt not thou too rest in peace (or wilt thou cry to me complaining from thy clay-cold bed) when that sad heart is no longer sad, and that sorrow is dead, which thou wert only called into the world to feel!

It is certain that there is nothing in the idea of a pre-existent state, that excites our longing like the prospect of a posthumous existence. We are satisfied to have begun life when we did; we have no ambition to have set out on our journey sooner; and feel that we have had quite enough to do to battle our way through since. We cannot say,

“The wars we well remember of King Nine,  
Of old Assaracus and Inachus divine:”

neither have we any wish: we are contented

to read of them in story, and to stand and gaze at the vast sea of time that separates us from them. It was early days then : the world was not *well-aired* enough for us : we have no inclination to have been up and stirring. We do not consider the six thousand years of the world before we were born as so much time lost to us : we are perfectly indifferent about the matter. We do not grieve and lament that we did not happen to be in time to see the grand mask and pageant of human life going on in all that period ; though we are mortified at being obliged to quit our station before the rest of the procession passes.

It may be suggested in explanation of this difference, that we know from various records and traditions what happened in the time of Queen Anne, or even in the reigns of the Assyrian monarchs : but that we have no means of ascertaining what is to happen hereafter except by awaiting the event, and that our eagerness and curiosity are sharpened in proportion as we are in the dark about it. This is not at all the case ; for at that rate we should be constantly wishing to make a voyage of dis-



covery to Greenland or to the Moon, neither of which we have, in general, the least desire to do. Neither, in truth, have we any particular solicitude to pry into the secrets of futurity, but as a pretext for prolonging our own existence. It is not so much that we care to be alive a hundred or a thousand years hence, any more than to have been alive a hundred or a thousand years ago : but the thing lies here, that we would all of us wish the present moment to last forever. We would be as we are, and would have the world remain just as it is, to please our fancy.

“The present eye catches the present object”—

to have and to hold while it may ; and we abhor, on any terms, to have it torn from us, and nothing left in its room. It is the pang of parting, the unloosing our grasp, the breaking asunder some strong tie, the leaving some cherished purpose unfulfilled, that creates the repugnance to go, and “ makes calamity of so long life,” as it often is.

———“Oh ! thou strong heart !

There's such a covenant 'twixt the world and thee,  
Ye're loth to break !”

The love of life, then, is an habitual attachment, not an abstract principle. Simply *to be* does not “content man’s natural desire :” we long to be in a certain time, place, and circumstance. We would much rather be now, “on this bank and shoal of time,” than have our choice of any future period, than take a slice of fifty or sixty years out of the Millennium, for instance. This shews that our attachment is not confined either to *being* or to *well-being* ; but that we have an inveterate prejudice in favour of our immediate existence, such as it is. The mountaineer will not leave his rock, nor the savage his hut ; neither are we willing to give up our present mode of life, with all its advantages and disadvantages, for any other that could be substituted for it. No man would, I think, exchange his existence with any other man, however fortunate. We had as lief *not be*, as *not be ourselves*. There are some persons of that reach of soul that they would like to live two hundred and fifty years hence, to see to what height of empire America will have grown up in that period. or

whether the English Constitution will last so long. These are points beyond me. But I confess I should like to live to see the downfall of Legitimacy. That is a vital question with me; and I shall like it the better, the sooner it happens!

No young man ever thinks he shall die. He may believe that others will, or assent to the doctrine that "all men are mortal" as an abstract proposition, but he is far enough from bringing it home to himself individually.<sup>1</sup> Youth, buoyant activity, and animal spirits hold absolute antipathy with old age as well as with death; nor have we, in the hey-day of life, any more than in the thoughtlessness of childhood, the remotest conception how

\* "This sensible warm motion can become  
A kneaded clod"—

nor how sanguine, florid health and vigour shall "turn to withered, weak, and grey." Or if in a moment of idle speculation we indulge

<sup>1</sup> "All men think all men mortal but themselves."

YOUNG.

In this notion of the close of life as a theory, it is amazing at what a distance it seems; what a long, leisurely perspective there is between; what a contrast its slow and solemn approach affords to our present gay fleeting existence! We eye the farthest verge of the horizon, and think what a way we shall have to look back upon, ere we arrive at our journey's end; and without our in the least suspecting it, the mists are at our feet, and the shadows of age encompass us. The two divisions of our lives have melted into each other: the extreme points close and meet with none of that romantic interval stretching out between them, that we had reckoned upon; and for the rich, melancholy, solemn hues of age, "the scar, the yellow leaf," the deepening shadows of an autumnal evening, we only feel a dank, cold mist encircling all objects, after the spirit of youth is fled. There is no inducement to look forward; and what is worse, little interest in looking back to what has become so trite and common. The pleasures of our existence have worn themselves out, are "gone into the wastes of

time," or have turned their indifferent side to us : the pains by their repeated blows have worn us out, and have left us neither spirit nor inclination to encounter them again in retrospect. We do not want to rip up old grievances, nor to renew our youth like the phoenix, nor to live our lives twice over. Once is enough. As the tree falls, so let it lie. We shut up the book and close the account once for all!

It has been thought by some that life is like the exploring of a passage that grows narrower and darker the farther we advance, without a possibility of ever turning back, and where we are stifled for want of breath at last. For myself, I do not complain of the greater thickness of the atmosphere as I approach the *narrow house*. I felt it more formerly,<sup>1</sup> when the idea alone seemed to suppress a thousand rising hopes, and weighed upon the pulses of the blood. At present I rather feel a thinness and want of

<sup>1</sup> I remember, once in particular, having this feeling in reading Schiller's *Don Carlos*, where there is a description of death, in a degree that almost choked me.

support, I stretch out my hand to some object and find none, I am too much in a world of abstraction; the naked map of life is spread out before me, and in the emptiness and desolation I see Death coming to meet me. In my youth I could not behold him for the crowd of objects and feelings, and Hope stood between us, saying—"Never mind that old fellow!" If I had lived *indeed*, I should not so much care to die. But I do not like a contract of pleasure broken off unfulfilled, a marriage with joy unconsummated, a promise of happiness rescinded. My public and private hopes have been left a ruin, or remain only to mock me. I would wish them to be reedified. I should like to see some prospect of good to mankind, such as my life began with. I should like to leave some sterling work behind me. I should like to have some friendly hand to consign me to the grave. On these conditions I am ready, if not willing, to depart. I could then write on my tomb—GRATEFUL AND CONTENTED! But I have thought and suffered too much to be willing to have thought and suffered in vain!—In looking

back, it sometimes appears to me as if I had in a manner slept out my life in a dream or trance on the side of the hill of knowledge, where I have fed on books, on thoughts, on pictures, and only heard in half-murmurs the trampling of busy feet, or the noises of the throng below. Waked out of this dim, twilight existence, and startled with the passing scene, I have felt a wish to descend to the world of realities, and join in the chase. But I fear too late, and that I had better return to my bookish chimeras and indolence once more! *Zanetto, lascia le donne, e studia la matematica.*

It is not wonderful that the contemplation and fear of death become more familiar to us as we approach nearer to it : that life seems to ebb with the decay of blood and youthful spirits ; and that as we find every thing about us subject to chance and change, as our strength and beauty die, as our hopes and passions, our friends and our affections leave us, we begin by degrees to feel ourselves mortal!

I have never seen death but once, and that

was in an infant. It is years ago. The look was calm and placid, and the face was fair and firm. It was as if a waxen image had been laid out in the coffin, and strewed with innocent flowers. It was not like death, but more like an image of life! No breath moved the lips, no pulse stirred, no sight or sound would enter those eyes or ears more. While I looked at it, I saw that no pain was there; it seemed to smile at the short pang of life which was over : but I could not bear the coffin-lid to be closed—it almost stifled me; and still as the nettles wave in a corner of the church-yard over his little grave, the welcome breeze helps to refresh me and ease the tightness at my breast!

An ivory or marble image, like Chantry's monument of the two children, is contemplated with pure delight. Why do we not grieve and fret that the marble is not alive, or fancy that it has a shortness of breath? It never was alive; and it is the difficulty of making the transition from life to death, the struggle between the two in our imagination, that confounds their properties painfully to-



gether, and makes us conceive that the infant that is but just dead, still wants to breathe, to enjoy, and look about it, and is prevented by the icy hand of death, locking up its faculties and benumbing its senses; so that, if it could, it would complain of its own hard fate. Perhaps religious considerations reconcile the mind to this change sooner than any others, by representing the spirit as fled to another sphere, and leaving the body behind it. But in reflecting on death generally, we mix up the idea of life with it, and thus make it the ghastly monster it is. We think how we should feel, not how the dead feel.

“ Still from the tomb the voice of nature cries;  
Even in our ashes live their wonted fires !”

There is an admirable passage on this subject in TUCKER'S *Light of Nature Pursued*, which I shall transcribe, as by much the best illustration I can offer of it.

“ The melancholy appearance of a lifeless body, the mansion provided for it to inhabit, dark, cold, close and solitary, are shocking to the imagination; but it is to the imagination

only, not to the understanding ; for whoever consults this faculty will see at first glance, that there is nothing dismal in all these circumstances : if the corpse were kept wrapped up in a warm bed, with a roasting fire in the chamber, it would feel no comfortable warmth therefrom ; were store of tapers lighted up as soon as day shuts in, it would see no objects to divert it ; were it left at large, it would have no liberty, nor if surrounded with company, would be cheered thereby ; neither are the distorted features expressions of pain, uneasiness, or distress. This every one knows, and will readily allow upon being suggested, yet still cannot behold, nor even cast a thought upon those objects without shuddering ; for knowing that a living person must suffer grievously under such appearances, they become habitually formidable to the mind, and strike a mechanical horror, which is increased by the customs of the world around us."

There is usually one pang added voluntarily and unnecessarily to the fear of death, by our affecting to compassionate the loss which

others will have in us. If that were all, we might reasonably set our minds at rest. The pathetic exhortation on country tomb-stones, "Grieve not for me, my wife and children dear," *etc.* is for the most part speedily followed to the letter. We do not leave so great a void in society as we are inclined to imagine, partly to magnify our own importance, and partly to console ourselves by sympathy. Even in the same family the gap is not so great; the wound closes up sooner than we should expect. Nay, *our room* is not unfrequently thought better than *our company*. People walk along the streets the day after our deaths just as they did before, and the crowd is not diminished. While we were living, the world seemed in a manner to exist only for us, for our delight and amusement, because it contributed to them. But our hearts cease to beat, and it goes on as usual, and thinks no more about us than it did in our life-time. The million are devoid of sentiment, and care as little for you or me as if we belonged to the moon. We live the week over in the Sunday's newspaper, or are

decently interred in some obituary at the month's end! It is not surprising that we are forgotten so soon after we quit this mortal stage : we are scarcely noticed, while we are on it. It is not merely that our names are not known in China—they have hardly been heard of in the next street. We are hand and glove with the universe, and think the obligation is mutual. This is an evident fallacy. If this, however, does not trouble us now, it will not hereafter. A handful of dust can have no quarrel to pick with its neighbours, or complaint to make against Providence, and might well exclaim, if it had but an understanding and a tongue, “Go thy ways, old world, swing round in blue ether, voluble to every age, you and I shall no more jostle!”

It is amazing how soon the rich and titled, and even some of those who have wielded great political power, are forgotten :

“A little rule, a little sway,  
Is all the great and mighty have  
Betwixt the cradle and the grave”—

and, after its short date, they hardly leave a name behind them. “A great man's me-

mory may, at the common rate, survive him half a year." His heirs and successors take his titles, his power, and his wealth—all that made him considerable or courted by others; and he has left nothing else behind him either to flatter or benefit the world. Posterity are not by any means so disinterested as they are supposed to be. They give their gratitude and admiration only in return for benefits conferred. They cherish the memory of those to whom they are indebted for instruction and delight; and they cherish it just in proportion to the instruction and delight they are conscious of receiving. The sentiment of admiration springs immediately from this ground; and cannot be otherwise than well-founded.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It has been usual to raise a very unjust clamour against the enormous salaries of public singers, actors, and so on. This matter seems reducible to a *moral equation*. They are paid out of money raised by voluntary contributions in the strictest sense; and if they did not bring certain sums into the treasury, the Managers would not engage them. These sums are exactly in proportion to the number of individuals to whom their performance gives an extraordinary degree of pleasure. The talents of a singer, actor, *etc.* are therefore worth just as much as they will fetch.

• The effeminate clinging to life as such, as a general or abstract idea, is the effect of a highly civilised and artificial state of society. Men formerly plunged into all the vicissitudes and dangers of war, or staked their all upon a single die, or some one passion, which if they could not have gratified, life became a burthen to them—now our strongest passion is to think, our chief amusement is to read new plays, new poems, new novels, and this we may do at our leisure, in perfect security, *ad infinitum*. If we look into the old histories and romances, before the *belles-lettres* neutralised human affairs and reduced passion to a state of mental equivocation, we find the heroes and heroines not setting their lives “at a pin’s fee,” but rather courting opportunities of throwing them away in very wantonness of spirit. They raise their fondness for some favourite pursuit to its height, to a pitch of madness, and think no price too dear to pay for its full gratification. Every thing else is dross. They go to death as to a bridal bed, and sacrifice themselves or others without remorse at the shrine of love, of honour,

of religion, or any other prevailing feeling. Romeo runs his "sea-sick, weary bark upon the rocks" of death, the instant he finds himself deprived of his Juliet; and she clasps his neck in their last agonies, and follows him to the same fatal shore. One strong idea takes possession of the mind and overrules every other; and even life itself, joyless without that, becomes an object of indifference or loathing. There is at least more of imagination in such a state of things, more vigour of feeling and promptitude to act than in our lingering, languid, protracted attachment to life for its own poor sake. It is perhaps also better, as well as more heroical, to strike at some daring or darling object, and if we fail in that, to take the consequences manfully, than to renew the lease of a tedious, spiritless, charmless existence, merely (as Pierre says) "to lose it afterwards in some vile brawl" for some worthless object. Was there not a spirit of martyrdom as well as a mixture of the reckless energy of barbarism in this bold defiance of death? Had not religion something to do with it; the implicit belief in

another state of being, which rendered this of less value, and embodied something beyond it to the imagination; so that the rough soldier, the infatuated lover, the valorous knight, *etc.* could afford to throw away the present venture, and take a leap into the arms of futurity, which the modern sceptic shrinks back from, with all his boasted reason and vain philosophy, weaker than a woman! I cannot help thinking so myself; but I have endeavoured to explain this point before, and will not enlarge farther on it here.

A life of action and danger moderates the dread of death. It not only gives us fortitude to bear pain, but teaches us at every step the precarious tenure on which we hold our present being. Sedentary and studious men are the most apprehensive on this score. Dr. Johnson was an instance in point. A few years seemed to him soon over, compared with those sweeping contemplations on time and infinity with which he had been used to pose himself. In the *still-life* of a man of letters, there was no obvious reason for a change. He might sit in an arm-chair and



pour out cups of tea to all eternity. Would it had been possible for him to do so ! The most rational cure after all for the inordinate fear of death is to set a just value on life. If we merely wish to continue on the scene to indulge our headstrong humours and tormenting passions, we had better begone at once : and if we only cherish a fondness for existence according to the benefits we reap from it, the pang we feel at parting with it will not be very severe !

## ESSAY XIII.

### ON APPLICATION TO STUDY.

---

No one is idle, who can do any thing. It is conscious inability, or the sense of repeated failure, that prevents us from undertaking, or deters us from the prosecution of any work.

Wilson the painter might be mentioned as an exception to this rule; for he was said to be an indolent man. After bestowing a few touches on a picture, he grew tired, and said to any friend who called in, "Now, let us go somewhere!" But the fact is, that Wilson could not finish his pictures minutely; and that those few masterly touches, carelessly thrown in of a morning, were all that he could do. The rest would have been labour lost. Morland has been referred to as another man

of genius, who could only be brought to work by fits and snatches. But his landscapes and figures (whatever degree of merit they might possess) were mere hasty sketches ; and he could produce all that he was capable of, in the first half-hour, as well as in twenty years. Why bestow additional pains without additional effect ? What he did was from the impulse of the moment, from the lively impression of some coarse, but striking object ; and with that impulse his efforts ceased, as they justly ought. There is no use in labouring, *invita Minerva*—nor any difficulty in it, when the Muse is not averse.

“The labour we delight in physics pain.”

Denner finished his unmeaning portraits with a microscope, and without being ever weary of his fruitless task ; for the essence of his genius was industry. Sir Joshua Reynolds, courted by the Graces and by Fortune, was hardly ever out of his painting-room ; and lamented a few days, at any time spent at a friend's house or at a nobleman's seat in the country, as so much time lost. That darkly -

illuminated room "to him a kingdom was :"  
his pencil was the sceptre that he wielded,  
and the throne on which his sitters were  
placed, a throne for Fame. Here he felt in-  
deed at home ; here the current of his ideas  
flowed full and strong ; here he felt most self-  
possession, most command over others ; and  
the sense of power urged him on to his de-  
lightful task with a sort of vernal cheerfulness  
and vigour, even in the decline of life. The  
feeling of weakness and incapacity would have  
made his hand soon falter, would have rebut-  
ted him from his object ; or had the canvas  
mocked, and been insensible to his toil, in-  
stead of gradually turning to

"A lucid mirror, in which nature saw  
All her reflected features,"

he would, like so many others, have thrown  
down his pencil in despair, or proceeded re-  
luctantly, without spirit and without success.  
Claude Lorraine, in like manner, spent whole  
mornings on the banks of the Tiber or in his  
study, eliciting beauty after beauty, adding  
touch to touch, getting nearer and nearer to

perfection, luxuriating in endless felicity—not merely giving the salient points, but filling up the whole intermediate space with continuous grace and beauty! What farther motive was necessary to induce him to persevere, but the bounty of his fate? What greater pleasure could he seek for, than that of seeing the perfect image of his mind reflected in the work of his hand? But as is the pleasure and the confidence produced by consummate skill, so is the pain and the disheartening effect of total failure. When for the fair face of nature we only see an unsightly blot issuing from our best endeavours, then the nerves slacken, the tears fill the eyes, and the painter turns away from his art, as the lover from a mistress that scorns him. Alas! how many such have, as the poet says,

“ Begun in gladness ;

Whereof has come in the end despondency and madness”—

not for want of will to proceed, (oh, no!) but for lack of power!

Hence it is that those often do best (up to a certain point of common-place success) w<sup>h</sup>o

have least knowledge and least ambition to excel. Their taste keeps pace with their capacity; and they are not deterred by insurmountable difficulties, of which they have no idea. I have known artists (for instance) of considerable merit, and a certain native rough strength and resolution of mind, who have been active and enterprising in their profession, but who never seemed to think of any works but those which they had in hand; they never spoke of a picture, or appeared to have seen one : to them Titian, Raphael, Rubens, Rembrandt, Correggio were as if they had never been : no tones, mellowed by time to soft perfection, lured them to their luckless doom, no divine forms baffled their vain embrace ; no sound of immortality rung in their ears, or drew off their attention from the calls of creditors or of hunger : they walked through collections of the finest works, like the Children in the Fiery Furnace, untouched, unapproached. With these true *terræ filii* the art might be supposed to begin and end : they thought only of the subject of their next production, the size of their next canvas, the grou-

ping, the getting in of the figures; and conducted their work to its conclusion with as little distraction of mind and as few misgivings, as a stage-coachman conducts a stage, or a carrier delivers a bale of goods, according to its destination. Such persons, if they do not rise above, at least seldom sink below themselves. They do not soar to the "highest Heaven of invention," nor penetrate the inmost recesses of the heart; but they succeed in all that they attempt or are capable of, as men of business and of industry in their calling. For them the veil of the Temple of Art is not rent asunder, and it is well: one glimpse of the Sanctuary, of the Holy of the Holies, might palsy their hands, and bedim their sight forever after!

I think there are two mistakes, common enough on this subject; *viz.* That men of genius, or of first-rate capacity, do little, except by intermittent fits, or *per saltum*—and that they do that little in a slight and slovenly manner. There may be instances of this; but they are not the highest, and they are the exceptions, not the rule. On the contrary, the greatest artists have in general been the most

prolific or the most elaborate, as the best writers have been frequently the most voluminous as well as indefatigable. We have a great living instance among writers, that the quality of a man's productions is not to be estimated in the inverse ratio of their quantity, I mean in the *Author of Waverley*; the fecundity of whose pen is no less admirable than its felicity. Shakespear is another instance of the same prodigality of genius; his materials being endlessly poured forth with no niggard or fastidious hand, and the mastery of the execution being (in many respects at least) equal to the boldness of the design. As one example among others that I might cite of the attention which he gave to his subject, it is sufficient to observe, that there is scarcely a word in any of his more striking passages that can be altered for the better. If any person, for instance, is trying to recollect a favourite line, and cannot hit upon some particular expression, it is in vain to think of substituting any other so good. That in the original text is not merely the best, but it seems the only right one. I will stop to illustrate this point a



little. I was at a loss the other day for the line in Henry V,

“ *Nice* customs cutesy to great kings.”

I could not recollect the word *nice* : I tried a number of others, such as *old*, *grave*, *etc.*—they would none of them do, but seemed all heavy, lumbering, or from the purpose : the word *nice*, on the contrary, appeared to drop into its place, and be ready to assist in paying the reverence due. Again,

“ A jest’s *prosperity* lies in the ear  
Of him that hears it ”

I thought, in quoting from memory, of “ A jest’s *success*,” “ A jest’s *renown*,” *etc.* I then turned to the volume, and there found the very word that of all others expressed the idea. Had Shakespear searched through the four quarters of the globe, he could not have lighted on another to convey so exactly what he meant—a *casual*, *hollow*, *sounding* success! I could multiply such examples, but that I am sure the reader will easily supply them himself; and they shew suffi-

ciently that Shakespear was not (as he is often represented) a loose or clumsy writer. The bold, happy texture of his style, in which every word is prominent, and yet cannot be torn from its place without violence, any more than a limb from the body, is (one should think) the result either of vigilant pains-taking, or of unerring, intuitive perception, and not the mark of crude conceptions, or "the random, blindfold blows of Ignorance."

There cannot be a greater contradiction to the common prejudice that "Genius is naturally a truant and a vagabond," than the astonishing and (on this hypothesis) unaccountable number of *chef-d'œuvres* left behind them by the Old Masters. The stream of their invention supplies the taste of successive generations like a river : they furnish a hundred Galleries, and preclude competition, not more by the excellence than by the extent of their performances. Take Raphael and Rubens for instance. There are works of theirs in single Collections enough to occupy a long and laborious life, and yet their works are

spread through all the Collections of Europe. They seem to have cost them no more labour than if they “ had drawn in their breath and pulled it forth again.” But we know that they made drawings, studies, sketches of all the principal of these, with the care and caution of the merest tyros in the art; and they remain equal proofs of their capacity and diligence. The *Cartoons* of Raphael alone might have employed many years, and made a life of illustrious labour, though they look as if they had been struck off at a blow, and are not a tenth part of what he produced in his short but bright career. Titian and Michael Angelo lived longer; but they worked as hard and did as well. Shall we bring in competition with examples like these some trashy caricaturist or idle dauber, who has no sense of the infinite resources of nature or art, nor consequently any power to employ himself upon them for any length of time or to any purpose, to prove that genius and regular industry are incompatible qualities?

In my opinion, the very superiority of the works of the great painters (instead of

being a bar to) accounts for their multiplicity. Power is pleasure; and pleasure sweetens pain. A fine poet thus describes the effect of the sight of nature on his mind :

——“The sounding cataract  
Haunted me like a passion : the tall rock,  
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,  
Their colours and their forms were then to me  
An appetite, a feeling, and a love,  
That had no need of a remoter charm  
By thought supplied, or any interest  
Unborrowed from the eye.”

So the forms of nature, or the human form divine, stood before the great artists of old, nor required any other stimulus to lead the eye to survey, or the hand to embody them, than the pleasure derived from the inspiration of the subject, and “propulsive force” of the mimic creation. The grandeur of their works was an argument with them, not to stop short, but to proceed. They could have no higher excitement or satisfaction than in the exercise of their art and endless generation of truth and beauty. Success prompts to exertion; and habit facilitates success. It is idle to suppose we can exhaust nature;

and the more we employ our own faculties, the more we strengthen them and enrich our stores of observation and invention. The more we do, the more we *can* do. Not indeed if we *get our ideas out of our own heads*—that stock is soon exhausted, and we recur to tiresome, vapid imitations of ourselves. But this is the difference between real and mock talent, between genius and affectation. Nature is not limited, nor does it become effete, like our conceit and vanity. The closer we examine it, the more it refines upon us; it expands as we enlarge and shift our view; it “grows with our growth, and strengthens with our strength.” The subjects are endless; and our capacity is invigorated as it is called out by occasion and necessity. He who does nothing, renders himself incapable of doing any thing; but while we are executing any work, we are preparing and qualifying ourselves to undertake another. The principles are the same in all nature; and we understand them better, as we verify them by experience and practice. It is not as if there was a given number of subjects

to work upon, or a set of *innate* or preconceived ideas in our minds, which we encroached upon with every new design; the subjects, as I said before, are endless, and we acquire ideas by imparting them. Our expenditure of intellectual wealth makes us rich : we can only be liberal as we have previously accumulated the means. By lying idle, as by standing still, we are confined to the same trite, narrow round of topics : by continuing our efforts, as by moving forwards in a road, we extend our views, and discover continually new tracts of country. *Genius*, like humanity, rusts for want of use.

Habit also gives promptness; and the soul of dispatch is decision. One man may write a book or paint a picture, while another is deliberating about the plan or the title-page. The great painters were able to do so much, because they knew exactly what they meant to do, and how to set about it. They were thorough-bred workmen, and were not learning their art while they were exercising it. We can do a great deal in a short time if we only know how. Thus an author may be-

come very voluminous, who only employs an hour or two in a day in study. If he has once obtained, by habit and reflection, a use of his pen with plenty of materials to work upon, the pages vanish before him. The time lost is in beginning, or in stopping after we have begun. If we only go forwards with spirit and confidence, we shall soon arrive at the end of our journey. A practised writer ought never to hesitate for a sentence from the moment he sets pen to paper, or think about the course he is to take. He must trust to his previous knowledge of the subject and to his immediate impulses, and he will get to the close of his task without accidents or loss of time. I can easily understand how the old divines and controversialists produced their folios : I could write folios myself, if I rose early and sat up late at this kind of occupation. But I confess I should be soon tired of it, besides wearying the reader.

In one sense, art is long and life is short. In another sense, this aphorism is not true. The best of us are idle half our time. It is wonderful how much is done in a short space,

provided we set about it properly, and give our minds wholly to it. Let any one devote himself to any art or science ever so strenuously, and he will still have leisure to make considerable progress in half a dozen other acquirements. Leonardo da Vinci was a mathematician, a musician, a poet, and an anatomist, besides being one of the greatest painters of his age. The Prince of Painters was a courtier, a lover, and fond of dress and company. Michael Angelo was a prodigy of versatility of talent—a writer of Sonnets (which Wordsworth has thought worth translating) and the friend of Dante. Salvator was a lutenist and a satirist. Titian was an elegant letter-writer, and a finished gentleman. Sir Joshua Reynolds's Discourses are more polished and classical even than any of his pictures. Let a man do all he can in any one branch of study, he must either exhaust himself and doze over it, or vary his pursuit, or else lie idle. All our real labour lies in a nut-shell. The mind makes, at some period or other, one Herculean effort, and the rest is mechanical. We have to climb a



steep and narrow precipice at first ; but after that, the way is broad and easy, where we may drive several accomplishments abreast. Men should have one principal pursuit, which may be both agreeably and advantageously diversified with other lighter ones, as the subordinate parts of a picture may be managed so as to give effect to the centre group. It has been observed by a sensible man,<sup>1</sup> that the having a regular occupation or professional duties to attend to is no excuse for putting forth an inelegant or inaccurate work ; for a habit of industry braces and strengthens the mind, and enables it to wield its energies with additional ease and steadier purpose.—Were I allowed to instance in myself, if what I write at present is worth nothing, at least it costs me nothing. But it cost me a great deal twenty years ago. I have added little to my stock since then, and taken little from it. I “ unfold the book and volume of the brain,” and transcribe the characters I see there as mechanically as any one might copy the letters

<sup>1</sup> The Rev. W. Shepherd of Gateacre, in the Preface to his *Life of Poggio*.

in a sampler. I do not say they came there mechanically—I transfer them to the paper mechanically. After eight or ten years' hard study, an author (at least) may go to sleep.

I do not conceive rapidity of execution necessarily implies slovenliness or crudeness. On the contrary, I believe it is often productive both of sharpness and freedom. The eagerness of composition strikes out sparks of fancy, and runs the thoughts more naturally and closely into one another. There may be less formal method, but there is more life and spirit and truth. In the play and agitation of the mind, it runs over, and we dally with the subject, as the glass-blower rapidly shapes the vitreous fluid. A number of new thoughts rise up spontaneously, and they come in the proper places, because they arise from the occasion. They are also sure to partake of the warmth and vividness of that ebullition of mind, from which they spring. *Spiritus precipitandus est.* In these sort of voluntaries in composition, the thoughts are worked up to a state of projection : the grasp of the subject, the presence of mind, the flow

of expression must be something akin to *extempore* speaking ; or perhaps such bold but finished draughts may be compared to *fresco* paintings, which imply a life of study and great previous preparation, but of which the execution is momentary and irrevocable. I will add a single remark on a point that has been much disputed. Mr. Cobbett lays it down that the first word that occurs is always the best. I would venture to differ from so great an authority. Mr. Cobbett himself indeed writes as easily and as well as he talks ; but he perhaps is hardly a rule for others without his practice and without his ability. In the hurry of composition three or four words may present themselves, one on the back of the other, and the last may be the best and right one. I grant thus much, that it is in vain to seek for the word we want, or endeavour to get at it second-hand, or as a paraphrase on some other word—it must come of itself, or arise out of an immediate impression or lively intuition of the subject ; that is, the proper word must be suggested immediately by the thought, but it need not be

presented as soon as called for. It is the same in trying to recollect the names of places, persons, *etc.* where we cannot force our memory; they must come of themselves by natural association, as it were; but they may occur to us when we least think of it, owing to some casual circumstance or link of connexion, and long after we have given up the search. Proper expressions rise to the surface from the heat and fermentation of the mind, like bubbles on an agitated stream. It is this which produces a clear and sparkling style.

In painting, great execution supplies the place of high finishing. A few vigorous touches, properly and rapidly disposed, will often give more of the appearance and texture (even) of natural objects than the most heavy and laborious details. But this masterly style of execution is very different from coarse daubing. I do not think, however, that the pains or polish an artist bestows upon his works necessarily interferes with their number. He only grows more enamoured of his task, proportionably patient, indefatigable, and devotes more of the day to study. The time we lose

is not in overdoing what we are about, but in doing nothing. Rubens had great facility of execution, and seldom went into the details. Yet Raphael, whose oil-pictures were exact and laboured, achieved, according to the length of time he lived, very nearly as much as he. In filling up the parts of his pictures, and giving them the last perfection they were capable of, he filled up his leisure hours, which otherwise would have lain idle on his hands. I have sometimes accounted for the slow progress of certain artists from the unfinished state in which they have left their works at last. These were evidently done by fits and throes—there was no appearance of continuous labour—one figure had been thrown in at a venture, and then another; and in the intervals between these convulsive and random efforts, more time had been wasted than could have been spent in working up each individual figure on the sure principles of art, and by a careful inspection of nature, to the utmost point of practicable perfection.

Some persons are afraid of their own works; and having made one or two successful efforts,

attempt nothing ever after. They stand still midway in the road to fame, from being startled at the shadow of their own reputation. This is a needless alarm. If what they have already done possesses real power, this will increase with exercise; if it has not this power, it is not sufficient to ensure them lasting fame. Such delicate pretenders tremble on the brink of *ideal* perfection, like dew-drops on the edge of flowers; and are fascinated, like so many Narcissuses, with the image of themselves, reflected from the public admiration. It is seldom indeed, that this cautious repose will answer its end. While seeking to sustain our reputation at the height, we are forgotten. Shakespear gave different advice, and himself acted upon it.

— ‘ Perseverance, dear my lord,  
Keeps honour bright. To have done, is to hang  
Quite out of fashion, like a rusty mail,  
In monumental mockery. Take the instant way;  
For honour travels in a strait so narrow,  
Where one but goes abreast. Keep then the path;  
For emulation hath a thousand sons,  
That one by one pursue. If you give way,  
Or hedge aside from the direct forth-right,  
Like to an enter’d tide, they all rush by.

And leave you hindmost :  
 Or like a gallant horse, fall'n in first rank,  
 Lie there for pavement to the abject rear,  
 O'er-run and trampled. Then what they do in present.  
 Though less than yours in past, must o'ertop yours :  
 For time is like a fashionable host,  
 That slightly shakes his parting guest by the hand,  
 And with his arms outstretch'd as he would fly,  
 Grasps in the comer. Welcome ever smiles,  
 And farewell goes out sighing. O let not virtue seek  
 Remuneration for the thing it was ; for beauty, wit,  
 High birth, vigour of bone, desert in service,  
 Love, friendship, charity, are subjects all  
 To envious and calumniating Time.  
 One touch of nature makes the whole world kin,  
 That all with one consent praise new-born gauds,  
 Though they are made and moulded of things past ;  
 And give to dust that is a little gilt  
 More laud than gilt o'er dusted.  
 The present eye praises the present object."

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA

I cannot very well conceive how it is that  
 some writers (even of taste and genius) spend  
 whole years in mere corrections for the press.  
 as it were—in polishing a line or adjusting a  
 comma. They take long to consider, exactly  
 as there is nothing worth the trouble of a mo-  
 ment's thought; and the more they deliberate,  
 the farther they are from deciding : for their

fastidiousness increases with the indulgence of it, nor is there any real ground for preference. They are in the situation of *Ned Softly* in the TATLER, who was a whole morning debating whether a line of a poetical epistle should run—

‘ You sing your song with so much art;’

OR,

You song you sing with so much art.”

These are points that it is impossible ever to come to a determination about; and it is only a proof of a little mind ever to have entertained the question at all.

There is a class of persons whose minds seem to move in an element of littleness; or rather, that are entangled in trifling difficulties, and incapable of extricating themselves from them. There was a remarkable instance of this improgressive, ineffectual, restless activity of temper in a late celebrated and very ingenious landscape-painter. “Never ending, still beginning,” his mind seemed entirely made up of points and fractions, nor could he by any means arrive at a conclusion



or a valuable whole. He made it his boast that he never sat with his hands before him, and yet he never did any thing. His powers and his time were frittered away in an importunate, uneasy, fidgetty attention to little things. The first picture he ever painted (when a mere boy) was a copy of his father's house; and he began it by counting the number of bricks in the front upwards and lengthways, and then made a scale of them on his canvas. This literal style and mode of study stuck to him to the last. He was placed under Wilson, whose example (if any thing could) might have cured him of this pettiness of conception; but nature prevailed, as it almost always does. To take pains to no purpose, seemed to be his motto, and the delight of his life. He left (when he died, not long ago) heaps of canvasses with elaborately finished pencil outlines on them, and with perhaps a little dead-colouring added here and there. In this state they were thrown aside, as if he grew tired of his occupation the instant it gave a promise of turning to account, and his whole object in the pursuit of art was to erect scaf-

foldings. The same intense interest in the most frivolous things extended to the common concerns of life, to the arranging of his letters, the labelling of his books, and the inventory of his wardrobe. Yet he was a man of sense, who saw the folly and the waste of time in all this, and could warn others against it. The perceiving our own weaknesses enables us to give others excellent advice, but it does not teach us to reform them ourselves. "Physician, heal thyself!" is the hardest lesson to follow. Nobody knew better than our artist that repose is necessary to great efforts, and that he who is never idle, labours in vain!

Another error is to spend one's life in procrastination and preparations for the future. Persons of this turn of mind stop at the threshold of art, and accumulate the means of improvement, till they obstruct their progress to the end. They are always putting off the evil day, and excuse themselves for doing nothing by commencing some new and indispensable course of study. Their projects are magnificent, but remote, and require years to complete or to put them in execution. Fame

is seen in the horizon, and flies before them. Like the recreant boastful knight in Spenser, they turn their backs on their competitors to make a great career, but never return to the charge. They make themselves masters of anatomy, of drawing, of perspective : they collect prints, casts, medallions, make studies of heads, of hands, of the bones, the muscles; copy pictures; visit Italy, Greece, and return as they went. They fulfil the proverb, "When you are at Rome, you must do as those at Rome do." This circuitous, erratic pursuit of art can come to no good. It is only an apology for idleness and vanity. Foreign travel especially makes men pedants, not artists. What we seek, we must find at home or nowhere. The way to do great things is to set about something, and he who cannot find resources in himself or in his own painting-room, will perform the Grand Tour, or go through the circle of the arts and sciences, and end just where he began !

The same remarks that have been here urged with respect to an application to the study of art, will in a great measure (though not in

every particular) apply to an attention to business : I mean, that exertion will generally follow success and opportunity in the one, as it does confidence and talent in the other. Give a man a motive to work, and he will work. A lawyer who is regularly feed, seldom . neglects to look over his briefs : the more business, the more industry. The stress laid upon early rising is preposterous. If we have any thing to do when we get up, we shall not lie in bed, to a certainty. Thomson the poet was found late in bed by Dr. Burney, and asked why he had not risen earlier. The Scotchman wisely answered, "I had no motive, young man !" What indeed had he to do after writing the SEASONS, but to dream out the rest of his existence, or employ it in writing the CASTLE OF INDOLENCE ! '

‘ School-boys attend to their tasks as soon as they acquire a relish for study, and they apply to that for which they find they have a capacity. If a boy shews no inclination for the Latin tongue, it is a sign he has not a turn for learning languages. Yet he dances well. Give up the thought of making a scholar of him, and bring him up to be a dancing-master ! ’

## ESSAY XIV.

### ON THE OLD AGE OF ARTISTS.

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“And their old age is beautiful and free.”

WORDSWORTH.

MR. NOLLEKENS died the other day at the age of eighty, and left 240,000 pounds behind him, and the name of one of our best English sculptors. There was a great scramble among the legatees, a codicil to a will with large bequests unsigned, and that last triumph of the dead or dying over those who survive—hopes raised and defeated without a possibility of retaliation, or the smallest use in complaint. The King was at first said to be left residuary legatee. This would have been a fine instance of romantic and gratuitous homage to Majesty, in a man who all his life-time could never be made to comprehend the abstract idea of the distinction of ranks or even of

persons. He would go up to the Duke of York or Prince of Wales (in spite of warning), take them familiarly by the button like common acquaintance, ask them *how their father did*; and express pleasure at hearing he was well, saying, “when he was gone, we should never get such another.” He once, when the old king was sitting to him for his bust, fairly stuck a pair of compasses into his nose to measure the distance from the upper lip to the forehead, as if he had been measuring a block of marble. His late Majesty laughed heartily at this, and was amused to find that there was a person in the world, ignorant of that vast interval which separated him from every other man. Nollekens, with all his loyalty, merely liked the man, and cared nothing about the King (which was one of those *mixed modes*, as Mr. Locke calls them, of which he had no more idea than if he had been one of the cream-coloured horses)—handled him like so much common clay, and had no other notion of the matter, but that it was his business to make the best bust of him he possibly could, and to set

about it in the regular way. There was something in this plainness and simplicity that savoured perhaps of the hardness and dryness of his art, and of his own peculiar severity of manner. He conceived that one man's head differed from another's only as it was a better or worse subject for modelling; that a bad bust was not made into a good one by being stuck upon a pedestal, or by any painting or varnishing; and that by whatever name he was called, "*a man's a man for a' that.*" A sculptor's ideas must, I should guess, be somewhat rigid and inflexible, like the materials in which he works. Besides, Nollekens's style was comparatively hard and edgy. He had as much truth and character, but none of the polished graces or transparent softness of Chantrey. He had more of the rough, plain, downright honesty of his art. It seemed to be his character. Mr. Northcote was once complimenting him on his acknowledged superiority—"Ay, *you* made the best busts of any body!" "I don't know about that," said the other, his eyes (though their orbs were quenched) smiling with a gleam of smothered

delight—"I only know I always tried to make them as like as I could!"

I saw this eminent and singular person one morning in Mr. Northcote's painting-room. He had then been for some time nearly blind, and had been obliged to lay aside the exercise of his profession; but he still took a pleasure in designing groups, and in giving directions to others for executing them. He and Northcote made a remarkable pair. He sat down on a low stool (from being rather fatigued) rested with both hands on a stick, as if he clung to the solid and tangible; had an habitual twitch in his limbs and motions, as if catching himself in the act of going too far in chiselling a lip or a dimple in a chin; was *bolt*-upright, with features hard and square, but finely cut, a hooked nose, thin lips, an indented forehead; and the defect in his sight completed his resemblance to one of his own masterly busts. He seemed, by time and labour, to "have *wrought* himself to stone." Northcote stood by his side—all air and spirit, stooping down to speak to him. The painter was in a loose morning-gown, with



or a valuable whole. He made it his boast that he never sat with his hands before him, and yet he never did any thing. His powers and his time were frittered away in an importunate, uneasy, fidgetty attention to little things. The first picture he ever painted (when a mere boy) was a copy of his father's house; and he began it by counting the number of bricks in the front upwards and lengthways, and then made a scale of them on his canvas. This literal style and mode of study stuck to him to the last. He was placed under Wilson, whose example (if any thing could) might have cured him of this pettiness of conception; but nature prevailed, as it almost always does. To take pains to no purpose, seemed to be his motto, and the delight of his life. He left (when he died, not long ago) heaps of canvasses with elaborately finished pencil outlines on them, and with perhaps a little dead-colouring added here and there. In this state they were thrown aside, as if he grew tired of his occupation the instant it gave a promise of turning to account, and his whole object in the pursuit of art was to erect scaff-

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WORDSWORTH.

MR. NOLLEKENS died the other day at the age of eighty, and left 240,000 pounds behind him, and the name of one of our best English sculptors. There was a great scramble among the legatees, a codicil to a will with large bequests unsigned, and that last triumph of the dead or dying over those who survive—hopes raised and defeated without a possibility of retaliation, or the smallest use in complaint. The King was at first said to be left residuary legatee. This would have been a fine instance of romantic and gratuitous homage to Majesty, in a man who all his life-time could never be made to comprehend the abstract idea of the distinction of ranks or even of

persons. He would go up to the Duke of York or Prince of Wales (in spite of warning), take them familiarly by the button like common acquaintance, ask them *how their father did*; and express pleasure at hearing he was well, saying, "when he was gone, we should never get such another." He once, when the old king was sitting to him for his bust, fairly stuck a pair of compasses into his nose to measure the distance from the upper lip to the forehead, as if he had been measuring a block of marble. His late Majesty laughed heartily at this, and was amused to find that there was a person in the world, ignorant of that vast interval which separated him from every other man. Nollekens, with all his loyalty, merely liked the man, and cared nothing about the KING (which was one of those *mixed modes*, as Mr. Locke calls them, of which he had no more idea than if he had been one of the cream-coloured horses)—handled him like so much common clay, and had no other notion of the matter, but that it was his business to make the best bust of him he possibly could, and to set

about it in the regular way. There was something in this plainness and simplicity that savoured perhaps of the hardness and dryness of his art, and of his own peculiar severity of manner. He conceived that one man's head differed from another's only as it was a better or worse subject for modelling; that a bad bust was not made into a good one by being stuck upon a pedestal, or by any painting or varnishing; and that by whatever name he was called, "*a man's a man for a' that.*" A sculptor's ideas must, I should guess, be somewhat rigid and inflexible, like the materials in which he works. Besides, Nollekens's style was comparatively hard and edgy. He had as much truth and character, but none of the polished graces or transparent softness of Chantrey. He had more of the rough, plain, downright honesty of his art. It seemed to be his character. Mr. Northcote was once complimenting him on his acknowledged superiority—"Ay, *you* made the best busts of any body!" "I don't know about that," said the other, his eyes (though their orbs were quenched) smiling with a gleam of smothered

delight—"I only know I always tried to make them as like as I could!"

I saw this eminent and singular person one morning in Mr. Northcote's painting-room. He had then been for some time nearly blind, and had been obliged to lay aside the exercise of his profession; but he still took a pleasure in designing groups, and in giving directions to others for executing them. He and Northcote made a remarkable pair. He sat down on a low stool (from being rather fatigued) rested with both hands on a stick, as if he clung to the solid and tangible; had an habitual twitch in his limbs and motions, as if catching himself in the act of going too far in chiselling a lip or a dimple in a chin; was *bolt*-upright, with features hard and square, but finely cut, a hooked nose, thin lips, an indented forehead; and the defect in his sight completed his resemblance to one of his own masterly busts. He seemed, by time and labour, to "have *wrought* himself to stone." Northcote stood by his side—all air and spirit, stooping down to speak to him. The painter was in a loose morning-gown, with



his back to the light ; his face was like a pale fine piece of colouring ; and his eye came out and glanced through the twilight of the past, like an old eagle looking from its eyrie in the clouds. In a moment they had lighted from the top of Mount Cenis in the Vatican—

“ As when a vulture on Imaus bred  
Flies tow’rds the springs  
Of Ganges and Hydaspes, Indian streams,”

these two fine old men lighted with winged thoughts on the banks of the Tiber, and there bathed and drank of the spirit of their youth. They talked of Titian and Bernini; and Northcote mentioned, that when Roubilliac came back from Rome, after seeing the works of the latter, and went to look at his own in Westminster Abbey, he said—“ By G—d, they looked like tobacco-pipes.”

They then recalled a number of anecdotes of Day (a fellow-student of theirs), of Barry and Fuseli. Sir Joshua and Burke and Johnson were talked of. The names of these great sons of memory were in the room, and they almost seemed to answer to them—Genius and Fame flung a spell into the air,

“ And by the force of blear illusion,  
Had drawn me on to my confusion,”

had I not been long ere this *siren-proof*! It is delightful, though painful, to hear two veterans in art thus talking over the adventures and studies of their youth, when one feels that they are not quite mortal, that they have one imperishable part about them, and that they are conscious, as they approach the farthest verge of humanity in friendly intercourse and tranquil decay, that they have done something that will live after them. The consolations of religion apart, this is perhaps the only salve that takes out the sting of that sore evil, Death; and by lessening the impatience and alarm at his approach, often tempts him to prolong the term of his absence.

It has been remarked that artists, or at least academicians, live long. It is but a short while ago that Northcote, Nollekens, West, Flaxman, Cosway, and Fuseli were all living at the same time, in good health and spirits, without any diminution of faculties, all of them having long past their grand climac-

teric, and attained to the highest reputation in their several departments. From these striking examples, the diploma of a Royal Academician seems to be a grant of a longer lease of life, among its other advantages. In fact, it is tantamount to the conferring a certain reputation in his profession and a competence on any man, and thus supplies the wants of the body and sets his mind at ease. Artists in general (poor devils!) I am afraid, are not a long-lived race. They break up commonly about forty, their spirits giving way with the disappointment of their hopes of excellence, or the want of encouragement for that which they have attained, their plans disconcerted, and their affairs irretrievable; and in this state of mortification and embarrassment (more or less prolonged and aggravated) they are either starved or else drink themselves to death. But your Academician is quite a different sort of person. He "bears a charmed life, that must not yield" to duns, or critics, or patrons. He is free of Parnassus, and claims all the immunities of fame in his life-time. He has but to paint (as the sun has

but to shine) to baffle envious maligners. He has but to send his pictures to the Exhibition at Somerset-House, in order to have them hung up : he has but to dine once a year with the Academy, the Nobility, the Cabinet-Ministers, and the Members of the Royal Family, in order not to want a dinner all the rest of the year. Shall hunger come near the man that has feasted with princes—shall a bailiff tap the shoulder on which a Marquis has familiarly leaned, that has been dubbed with knighthood? No, even “the fell Serjeant Death” stands as it were aloof; and he enjoys a kind of premature immortality in recorded honours and endless labours. Oh! what golden hours are his! In the short days of winter he husbands time; the long evenings of summer still find him employed! He paints on, and takes no thought for to-morrow. All is right in that respect. His bills are regularly paid; his drafts are duly honoured. He has exercise for his body, employment for his mind in his profession, and without ever stirring out of his painting-room. He studies as much of other things as he pleases. He

goes into the best company, or talks with 'his sitters—attends at the Academy Meetings, and enters into their intrigues and cabals, or stays at home, and enjoys the *otium cum dignitate*. If he is fond of reputation, Fame watches him at work, and weaves a woof, like Iris, over his head—if he is fond of money, Plutus digs a mine under his feet. Whatever he touches becomes gold. He is paid half-price before he begins; and commissions pour in upon commissions. His portraits are like, and his historical pieces fine; for to question the talents or success of a Royal Academician is to betray your own want of taste. Or if his pictures are not quite approved, he is an agreeable man, and converses well. Or he is a person of elegant accomplishments, dresses well, and is an ornament to a private circle. A man is not an Academician for nothing. “His life spins round on its soft axle;” and in the lapse of uninterrupted thoughts and pleasing avocations, without any of the *wear and tear* of the world or of business, there seems no reason why it should not run smoothly on to its last sand!

Of all the Academicians, the painters, or persons I have ever known, Mr. Northcote is the most to my taste. It may be said of him truly,

“Age cannot wither, nor custom stale  
His infinite variety.”

Indeed, it is not possible he should become tedious, since, even if he repeats the same thing, it appears quite new from his manner, that breathes new life into it, and from his eye, that is as fresh as the morning. How you hate any one who tells the same story or anticipates a remark of his—it seems so coarse and vulgar, so dry and inanimate! There is something like injustice in this preference—but no! it is a tribute to the spirit that is in the man. Mr. Northcote’s manner is completely *extempore*. It is just the reverse of Mr. Canning’s oratory. All his thoughts come upon him unawares, and for this reason they surprise and delight you, because they have evidently the same effect upon his own mind. There is the same unconsciousness in his conversation that has been pointed out in Shakespear’s dialogues; or you are startled with

one observation after another, as when the mist gradually withdraws from a landscape and unfolds a number of objects one by one. His figure is small, shadowy, emaciated; but you think only of his face, which is fine and expressive. His body is out of the question. It is impossible to convey an adequate idea of the *naïveté*, and unaffected, but delightful ease of the way in which he goes on—now touching upon a picture—now looking for his snuff-box—now alluding to some book he has been reading—now returning to his favourite art. He seems just as if he was by himself or in the company of his own thoughts, and makes you feel quite at home. If it is a Member of Parliament, or a beautiful woman, or a child, or a young artist that drops in, it makes no difference; he enters into conversation with them in the same unconstrained manner, as if they were inmates in his family. Sometimes you find him sitting on the floor, like a school-boy at play, turning over a set of old prints; and I was pleased to hear him say the other day, coming to one of some men putting off in a boat from a ship-wreck

—“ *That* is the grandest and most original thing I ever did!” This was not egotism, but had all the beauty of truth and sincerity. The print was indeed a noble and spirited design. The circumstance from which it was taken happened to Captain Englefield and his crew. He told Northcote the story, sat for his own head, and brought the men from Wapping to sit for theirs ; and these he had arranged into a formal composition, till one Jeffrey, a conceited but clever artist of that day, called in upon him, and said, “ Oh ! that common-place thing will never do, it is like West ; you should throw them into an action something like this.”—Accordingly, the head of the boat was reared up like a sea-horse riding the waves, and the elements put into commotion ; and when the painter looked at it the last thing as he went out of his room in the dusk of the evening, he said that “ it frightened him.” He retained the expression in the faces of the men nearly as they sat to him. It is very fine, and truly English ; and being natural, it was easily made into history. There is a portrait of a young



gentleman striving to get into the boat, while the crew are pushing him off with their oars; but at last he prevailed with them by his perseverance and entreaties to be taken in. They had only time to throw a bag of biscuits into the boat before the ship went down; which they divided into a biscuit a day for each man, dipping them into water which they collected by holding up their handkerchiefs in the rain and squeezing it into a bottle. They were out sixteen days in the Atlantic, and got ashore at some place in Spain, where the great difficulty was to prevent them from eating too much at once, so as to recover gradually. Captain Englefield observed that he suffered more afterwards than at the time—that he had horrid dreams of falling down precipices for a long while after—that in the boat they told merry stories, and kept up one another's spirits as well as they could, and on some complaint being made of their distressed situation, the young gentleman who had been admitted into their crew remarked, “Nay, we are not so badly off neither, we are not come to *eating*

one another yet!"—Thus, whatever is the subject, the scene is revived in Mr. Northcote's mind, and every circumstance brought before you without affectation or effort, just as it happened. It might be called *picture-talking*. He has always some apt allusion or anecdote. A young engraver came into his room the other day, with a print which he had put into the crown of his hat, in order not to crumple it, and he said it had been nearly blown away several times in passing along the street. "You put me in mind," said Northcote, "of a bird-catcher at Plymouth, who used to put the birds he had caught into his hat to bring them home, and one day meeting my father in the road, he pulled off his hat to make him a low bow, and all the birds flew away!" Sometimes Mr. Northcote gets to the top of a ladder to paint a palm-tree or to finish a sky in one of his pictures; and in this situation he listens very attentively to any thing you tell him. I was once mentioning some strange inconsistencies of our modern poets: and on coming to one that exceeded the rest, he descended

the steps of the ladder one by one, laid his pallet and brushes deliberately on the ground, and coming up to me, said—"You don't say so, it's the very thing I should have supposed of them : yet these are the men that speak against Pope and Dryden." Never any sarcasms were so fine, so cutting, so careless as his. The grossest things from his lips seem an essence of refinement : the most refined became more so than ever. Hear him talk of Pope's Epistle to Jervas, and repeat the lines—

"Yet should the Graces all thy figures place,  
And breathe an air divine on every face;  
Yet should the Muses bid my numbers roll  
Strong as their charms, and gentle as their soul,  
With Zenxis' Helen thy Bridgewater vie,  
And these be sung till Granville's Myra die  
Alas! how little from the grave we claim;  
Thou but preserv'st a face, and I a name."

Or let him speak of Boccacio and his story of Isabella and her pot of basil, in which she kept her lover's head and watered it with her tears, "and how it grew, and it grew, and it grew," and you see his own eyes glisten, and the leaves of the basil-tree tremble to his faltering accents!

Mr. Fuseli's conversation is more striking and extravagant, but less pleasing and natural than Mr. Northcote's. He deals in paradoxes and caricatures. He talks allegories and personifications, as he paints them. You are sensible of effort without any repose—no careless pleasantry—no traits of character or touches from nature—every thing is laboured or overdone. His ideas are gnarled, hard, and distorted, like his features—his theories stalking and straddle-legged, like his gait—his projects aspiring and gigantic, like his gestures—his performance uncouth and dwarfish, like his person. His pictures are also like himself, with eye-balls of stone stuck in rims of tin, and muscles twisted together like ropes or wires. Yet Fuseli is undoubtedly a man of genius, and capable of the most wild and grotesque combinations of fancy. It is a pity that he ever applied himself to painting, which must always be reduced to the test of the senses. He is a little like Dante or Ariosto perhaps; but no more like Michael Angelo, Raphael, or Correggio than I am. Nature, he complains, puts him out. Yet he can laugh

at, artists who “paint ladies with iron lap-dogs;” and he describes the great masters of old in words and images full of truth, and glancing from a pen or tongue of fire. I conceive any person would be more struck with Mr. Fuseli at first sight, but would wish to visit Mr. Northcote oftener. There is a bold and startling outline in his style of talking, but not the delicate finishing or bland tone that there is in that of the latter. Whatever there is harsh or repulsive about him is, however, in a great degree carried off by his animated foreign accent and broken English, which give character where there is none, and soften its asperities where it is too abrupt and violent.

Compared to either of these artists, Mr. West (the late President of the Royal Academy) was a thoroughly mechanical and *common-place* person—a man “of no mark or likelihood.” He too was small, thin, but with regular well-formed features, and a precise, sedate, self-satisfied air. This, in part, arose from the conviction in his own mind that he was the greatest painter (and consequently the

greatest man) in the world : kings and nobles were common every-day folks, while there was but one West in the many-peopled globe. If there was any one individual with whom he was inclined to share the palm of undivided superiority, it was with Bonaparte. When Mr. West had painted a picture, he thought it was perfect. He had no idea of any thing in the art but rules, and these he exactly conformed to ; so that, according to his theory, what he did was quite right. He conceived of painting as a mechanical or scientific process, and had no more doubt of a face or a group in one of his high ideal compositions being what it ought to be, than a carpenter has that he has drawn a line straight with a ruler and a piece of chalk, or than a mathematician has that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right ones.

When Mr. West walked through his Gallery, the result of fifty years' labour, he saw nothing, either on the right or the left, to be added or taken away. The account he gave of his own pictures, which might seem like ostentation or rhodomontade, had a sincere

and infantine simplicity in it. When some one spoke of his *St. Paul shaking off the serpent from his arm* (at Greenwich Hospital, I believe), he said, "A little burst of genius, sir!" West was one of those happy mortals who had not an idea of any thing beyond himself or his own actual powers and knowledge. The whole art with him consisted in measuring the distance from the foot to the knee, in counting the number of muscles in the calf of the leg, in dividing his subject into three groups, in lifting up, the eyebrows to express pity or wonder, and in contracting them to express anger or contempt. Looking at a picture of Rubens, which he had in his possession, he said, with great indifference, "What a pity that this man wanted expression!" This natural self-complacency might be strengthened by collateral circumstances of birth and religion. West, as a native of America, might be supposed to own no superior in the Commonwealth of art: as a Quaker, he smiled with sectarian self-sufficiency at the objections that were made to his theory or practice in painting. He lived long in the firm

persuasion of being one of the elect among the sons of Fame, and went to his final rest in the arms of Immortality! Happy error! Envidable old man!

Flaxman is another living and eminent artist, who is distinguished by success in his profession and by a prolonged and active old age. He is diminutive in person, like the others. I know little of him, but that he is an elegant sculptor, and a profound mystic. This last is a character common to many other artists in our days—Louthembourg, Cosway, Blake, Sharp, Varley, *etc.*—who seem to relieve the literalness of their professional studies by voluntary excursions into the regions of the preternatural, pass their time between sleeping and waking, and whose ideas are like a stormy night, with the clouds driven rapidly across, and the blue sky and stars gleaming between!

Cosway is the last of these I shall mention. At that name I pause, and must be excused if I consecrate to him a frail memorial in my careless manner; for he was Fancy's child. What a fairy palace was his of specimens of art, anti-



quarianism, and *virtu*, jumbled all together in the richest disorder, dusty, shadowy, obscure, with much left to the imagination (how different from the finical, polished, petty, modernised air of some Collections we have seen!) and with copies of the Old Masters, cracked and damaged, which he touched and retouched with his own hand, and yet swore they were the genuine, the pure originals. All other collectors are fools to him: they go about with painful anxiety to find out the realities:—he *said* he had them—and in a moment made them of the breath of his nostrils and of the fumes of a lively imagination. His was the crucifix that Abelard prayed to—a lock of Eloisa's hair—the dagger with which Felton stabbed the Duke of Buckingham—the first finished sketch of the *Jocunda*—Titian's large colossal profile of Peter Aretine—a mummy of an Egyptian king—a feather of a phoenix—a piece of Noah's Ark. Were the articles authentic? What matter?—his faith in them was true. He was gifted with a *second-sight* in such matters: he believed whatever was incredible. Fancy bore sway

## OF ARTISTS.

in him; and so vivid were his impressions, that they included the substances of things in them. The agreeable and the true with him were one. He believed in Swedenborgianism—he believed in animal magnetism—he had conversed with more than one person of the Trinity—he could talk with his lady at Mantua through some fine vehicle of sense, as we speak to a servant down-stairs through a conduit-pipe. Richard Cosway was not the man to flinch from an *ideal* proposition. Once, at an Academy dinner, when some question was made whether the story of Lambert's Leap was true, he started up, and said it was; for he was the person that performed it:—he once assured me that the knee-pan of King James I, in the ceiling at Whitehall, was nine feet across (he had measured it in concert with Mr. Cipriani, who was repairing the figures)—he could read in the Book of the Revelations without spectacles, and foretold the return of Bonaparte from Elba—and from St. Helena! His wife, the most lady-like of Englishwomen, being asked in Paris what sort of a man her husband was, made

answer—" *Toujours riant, toujours gai.*" This was his character. He must have been of French extraction. His soul appeared to possess the life of a bird ; and such was the jauntiness of his air and manner, that to see him sit to have his half-boots laced on, you would fancy (by the help of a figure) that, instead of a little withered elderly gentleman, it was Venus attired by the Graces. His miniatures and whole-length drawings were not merely fashionable—they were fashion itself. His imitations of Michael Angelo were not the thing. When more than ninety, he retired from his profession, and used to hold up the palsied hand that had painted lords and ladies for upwards of sixty years, and smile, with unabated good-humour, at the vanity of human wishes. Take him with all his faults and follies, we scarce "shall look upon his like again !"

Why should such characters ever die ? It seems hard upon them and us ! Care fixes no sting in their hearts, and their persons "present no mark to the foe-man." Death in them seizes upon living shadows. They

scarce consume vital air : their gross functions have been long at an end—they live but to paint, to talk or think. Is it that the vice of age, the miser's fault, gnaws them ? Many of them are not afraid of death, but of coming to want ; and having begun in poverty, are haunted with the idea that they shall end in it, and so are willing to die—to *save charges*. Otherwise, they might linger on forever, and “defy augury !”

## ESSAY XV.

### ON EGOTISM.

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It is mentioned in the Life of Salvator Rosa, that on the occasion of an altar-piece of his being exhibited at Rome, in the triumph of the moment, he compared himself to Michael Angelo, and spoke against Raphael, calling him *hard, dry*, etc. Both these were fatal symptoms for the ultimate success of the work: the picture was in fact afterwards severely censured, so as to cause him much uneasiness; and he passed a great part of his life in quarrelling with the world for admiring his landscapes, which were truly excellent, and for not admiring his historical pieces, which were full of defects. Salvator wanted self-knowledge, and that respect for others, which is both a cause and consequence of it. Like

many more, he mistook the violent and irritable workings of self-will (in a wrong direction) for the impulse of genius, and his insensibility to the vast superiority of others for a proof of his equality with them.

In the first place, nothing augurs worse for any one's pretensions to the highest rank of excellence than his making free with those of others. He who boldly and unreservedly places himself on a level with the *mighty dead*, shews a want of sentiment—the only thing that can ensure immortality to his own works. When we forestal the judgment of posterity, it is because we are not confident of it. A mind that brings all others into a line with its own naked or assumed merits, that sees all objects in the foreground as it were, that does not regard the lofty monuments of genius through the atmosphere of fame, is coarse, crude, and repulsive as a picture without aerial perspective. Time, like distance, spreads a haze and a glory round all things. Not to perceive this, is to want a sense, is to be without imagination. Yet there are those who strut in their own self-opinion,

and deck themselves out in the plumes of fancied self-importance as if they were crowned with laurel by Apollo's own hand. There was nothing in common between Salvator and Michael Angelo : otherwise, the consciousness of the power with which he had to contend would have over-awed and struck him dumb ; so that the very familiarity of his approaches proved (as much as any thing else) the immense distance placed between them. Painters alone seem to have a trick of putting themselves on an equal footing with the greatest of their predecessors, of advancing, on the sole strength of their vanity and presumption, to the highest seats in the Temple of Fame, of talking of themselves and Raphael and Michael Angelo in the same breath ! What should we think of a poet who should publish to the world, or give a broad hint in private, that he conceived himself fully on a par with Homer or Milton or Shakespear ? It would be too much for a friend to say so of him. But artists suffer their friends to puff them in the true " King Cambyzes' vein " without blushing. Is it that they are often

mèn without a liberal education, who have no notion of any thing that does not come under their immediate observation, and who accordingly prefer the living to the dead, and themselves to all the rest of the world? Or that there is something in the nature of the profession itself, fixing the view on a particular point of time, and not linking the present either with the past or future?

Again, Salvator's disregard for Raphael, instead of inspiring him with any thing like "vain and self-conceit," ought to have taught him the greatest diffidence in himself. Instead of anticipating a triumph over Raphael from this circumstance, he might have foreseen in it the sure source of his mortification and defeat. The public looked to find in *his* pictures what he did not see in Raphael, and were necessarily disappointed. He could hardly be expected to produce that which when produced and set before him, he did not feel or understand. The genius for a particular thing does not imply taste in general or for other things, but it assuredly presupposes a taste or feeling for that particular



thing. Salvator was so much offended with the *dryness, hardness*, etc. of Raphael, only because he was not struck, that is, did not sympathise with the divine mind within. If he had, he would have bowed as at a shrine, in spite of the homeliness or finicalness of the covering. Let no man build himself a spurious self-esteem on his contempt or indifference for acknowledged excellence. He will in the end pay dear for a momentary delusion: for the world will sooner or later discover those deficiencies in him, which render him insensible to all merits but his own.

Of all modes of acquiring distinction and, as it were, “getting the start of the majestic world,” the most absurd as well as disgusting is that of setting aside the claims of others in the lump, and holding out our own particular excellence or pursuit as the only one worth attending to. We thus set ourselves up as the standard of perfection, and treat every thing else that diverges from that standard as beneath our notice. At this rate, a contempt for any thing and a superiority to it are sy-

anonymous. It is a cheap and a short way of shewing that we possess all excellence within ourselves, to deny the use or merit of all those qualifications that do not belong to us. According to such a mode of computation, it would appear that our value is to be estimated not by the number of acquirements that we *do* possess, but of those in which we are deficient and to which we are insensible :—so that we can at any time supply the place of wisdom and skill by a due proportion of ignorance, affectation, and conceit. If so, the dullest fellow, with impudence enough to despise what he does not understand, will always be the brightest genius and the greatest man. If stupidity is to be a substitute for taste, knowledge, and genius, any one may dogmatise and play the critic on this ground. We may easily make a monopoly of talent, if the torpedo-touch of our callous and wilful indifference is to neutralise all other pretensions. We have only to deny the advantages of others to make them our own : illiberality will carve out the way to pre-eminence much better than toil or study or quickness of parts;

and by narrowing our views and divesting ourselves at last of common feeling and humanity, we may arrogate every valuable accomplishment to ourselves, and exalt ourselves vastly above our fellow-mortals ! That is, in other words, we have only to shut our eyes, in order to blot the sun out of heaven, and to annihilate whatever gives light or heat to the world, if it does not emanate from one single source, by spreading the cloud of our own envy, spleen, malice, want of comprehension, and prejudice over it. Yet how many are there who act upon this theory in good earnest, grow more bigoted to it every day, and not only become the dupes of it themselves, but by dint of gravity, by bullying and brow-beating, succeed in making converts of others !

A man is a political economist. Good : but this is no reason he should think there is nothing else in the world, or that every thing else is good for nothing. Let us suppose that this is the most important subject, and that being his favourite study, he is the best judge of that point, still it is not the only one

—why then treat every other question or pursuit with disdain as insignificant and mean, or endeavour to put others who have devoted their whole time to it out of conceit with that, on which they depend for their amusement or (perhaps) subsistence? I see neither the wit, wisdom, nor good-nature of this mode of proceeding. Let him fill his library with books on this one subject, yet other persons are not bound to follow the example, and exclude every other topic from theirs—let him write, let him talk, let him think on nothing else, but let him not impose the same pedantic humour as a duty or a mark of taste on others—let him ride the *high horse*, and drag his heavy load of mechanical knowledge along the iron rail-way of the master-science, but let him not move out of it to taunt or jostle those who are jogging quietly along upon their several *hobbies*, who “owe him no allegiance,” and care not one jot for his opinion. Yet we could forgive such a person, if he made it his boast that he had read Don Quixote twice through in the original Spanish, and pre-

ferred Lycidas to all Milton's smaller poems ! What would Mr. ——— say to any one who should profess a contempt for political economy ? He would answer very bluntly and very properly, “ Then you know nothing about it.” It is a pity that so sensible a man and close a reasoner should think of putting down other lighter and more elegant pursuits by professing a contempt or indifference for them, which springs from precisely the same source, and is of just the same value. But so it is that there seems to be a tacit presumption of folly in whatever gives pleasure ; while an air of gravity and wisdom hovers round the painful and precise !

A man comes into a room, and on his first entering, declares without preface or ceremony his contempt for poetry. Are we therefore to conclude him a greater genius than Homer ? No : but by this cavalier opinion he assumes a certain natural ascendancy over those who admire poetry. To *look down* upon any thing seemingly implies a greater elevation and enlargement of view than to *look up* to it. The present Lord Chancellor

took upon him to declare in open court that he would not go across the street to hear Madame Catalani sing. What did this prove? His want of an ear for music, not his capacity for any thing higher. So far as it went, it only shewed him to be inferior to those thousands of persons who go with eager expectation to hear her, and come away with astonishment and rapture. A man might as well tell you he is deaf, and expect you to look at him with more respect. The want of any external sense or organ is an acknowledged defect and infirmity : the want of an internal sense or faculty is equally so, though our self-love contrives to give a different turn to it. We mortify others by *throwing cold water* on that in which they have an advantage over us, or stagger their opinion of an excellence which is not of self-evident or absolute utility, and lessen its supposed value, by limiting the universality of a taste for it. Lord Eldon's protest on this occasion was the more extraordinary, as he is not only a good-natured but a successful man. These little spiteful allusions are most apt to proceed from disap-

pointed vanity, and an apprehension that justice is not done to ourselves. By being at the top of a profession, we have leisure to look beyond it. Those who really excel and are allowed to excel in any thing have no excuse for trying to gain a reputation by undermining the pretensions of others; they stand on their own ground; and do not need the aid of invidious comparisons. Besides, the consciousness of excellence produces a fondness for, a faith in it. I should half suspect that any one could not be a great lawyer, who denied that Madame Catalani was a great singer. The Chancellor must dislike her decisive tone, the rapidity of her movements! The late Chancellor (Erskine) was a man of (at least) a different stamp. In the exuberance and buoyancy of his animal spirits, he scattered the graces and ornaments of life over the dust and cobwebs of the law. What is there that is now left of him—what is there to redeem his foibles, or to recall the flush of early enthusiasm in his favour, or kindle one spark of sympathy in the breast, but his romantic admiration of Mrs. Siddons?

There are those who, if you praise *Walton's Complete Angler*, sneer at it as a childish or old-womanish performance : some laugh at the amusement of fishing as silly, others carp at it as cruel ; and Dr. Johnson said that “ a fishing-rod was a stick with a hook at one end, and a fool at the other.” I would rather take the word of one who had stood for days up to his knees in water, and in the coldest weather, intent on this employ, who returned to it again with unabated relish, and who spent his whole life in the same manner without being weary of it at last. There is something in this more than Dr. Johnson's definition accounts for. A *fool* does not take an interest in any thing ; or if he does, it is better to be a fool, than a wise man, whose only pleasure is to disparage the pursuits and occupations of others, and out of ignorance or prejudice to condemn them, merely because they are not *his*.

Whatever interests, is interesting. I know of no way of estimating the real value of objects in all their bearings and consequences, but I can tell at once their intellectual value



by the degree of passion or sentiment the very idea and mention of them excites in the mind. To judge of things by reason or the calculations of positive utility is a slow, cold, uncertain, and barren process—their power of appealing to and affecting the imagination as subjects of thought and feeling is best measured by the habitual impression they leave upon the mind, and it is with this only we have to do in expressing our delight or admiration of them, or in setting a just mental value upon them. They ought to excite all the emotion which they do excite; for this is the instinctive and unerring result of the constant experience we have had of their power of affecting us, and of the associations that cling unconsciously to them. Fancy, feeling may be very inadequate tests of truth; but truth itself operates chiefly on the human mind through them. It is in vain to tell me that what excites the heart-felt sigh of youth, the tears of delight in age, and fills up the busy interval between with pleasing and lofty thoughts, is frivolous, or a waste of time, or of no use. You only by that give me a mean

opinion of your ideas of utility. The labour of years, the triumph of aspiring genius and consummate skill, is not to be put down by a cynical frown, by a supercilious smile, by an ignorant sarcasm. Things barely of use are subjects of professional skill and scientific inquiry : they must also be beautiful and pleasing to attract common attention, and to be naturally and universally interesting. A pair of shoes is good to wear : a pair of sandals is a more picturesque object; and a statue or a poem are certainly good to think and talk about, which are part of the business of life. To think and speak of them with contempt is therefore a wilful and studied solecism. Pictures are good things to go and see. This is what people do ; they do not expect to taste or make a dinner of them ; but we sometimes want to fill up the time before dinner. The progress of civilisation and refinement is from instrumental to final causes : from supplying the wants of the body to providing luxuries for the mind. To stop at the *mechanical*, and refuse to proceed to the *fine arts*, or churlishly to reject all ornamental studies and

elegant accomplishments as mean and trivial, because they only afford employment to the imagination, create food for thought, furnish the mind, sustain the soul in health and enjoyment, is a rude and barbarous theory—

“Et propter vitam peidere causas vivendi.”

Before we absolutely condemn any thing, we ought to be able to shew something better. not merely in itself, but in the same class. To know the best in each class infers a higher degree of taste ; to reject the class is only a negation of taste ; for different classes do not interfere with one another, nor can any one's *ipse dixit* be taken on so wide a question as abstract excellenc. Nothing is truly and altogether despicable that excites angry contempt or warm opposition, since this always implies that some one else is of a different opinion, and takes an equal interest in it.

When I speak of what is interesting, however, I mean not only to a particular profession, but in general to others. Indeed, it is the very popularity and obvious interest attached to certain studies and pursuits, that

excites the envy and hostile regard of graver and more recondite professions. Man is perhaps not naturally an egotist, or at least he is satisfied with his own particular line of excellence and the value that he supposes inseparable from it, till he comes into the world and finds it of so little account in the eyes of the vulgar; and he then turns round and vents his chagrin and disappointment on those more attractive, but (as he conceives) superficial studies, which cost less labour and patience to understand them, and are of so much less use to society. The injustice done to ourselves makes us unjust to others. The man of science and the hard student (from this cause, as well as from a certain unbending hardness of mind) come at last to regard whatever is generally pleasing and striking as worthless and light, and to proportion their contempt to the admiration of others; while the artist, the poet, and the votary of pleasure and popularity treat the more solid and useful branches of human knowledge as disagreeable and dull. This is often carried to too great a length. It is enough that “wisdom is justi-

fied of her children : ” the philosopher ought to smile, instead of being angry at the folly of mankind (if such it is), and those who find both pleasure and profit in adorning and polishing the airy “ capitals ” of science and of art, ought not to grudge those who toil underground at the foundation, the praise that is due to their perseverance and self-denial. There is a variety of tastes and capacities, that requires all the variety of men’s talents to administer to it. The less excellent must be provided for, as well as the more excellent. Those who are only capable of amusement ought to be amused. If all men were forced to be great philosophers and lasting benefactors of their species, how few of us could ever do any thing at all ! But nature acts more impartially, though not improvidently. Wherever she bestows a *turn* for any thing on the individual, she implants a corresponding taste for it in others. We have only to “ throw our bread upon the waters, and after many days we shall find it again.” Let us do our best, and we need not be ashamed of the smallness of our talent, or afraid of the

calumnies and contempt of envious maligners. When Goldsmith was talking one day to Sir Joshua of writing a fable in which little fishes were to be introduced, Dr. Johnson rolled about uneasily in his seat and began to laugh, on which Goldsmith said rather angrily—  
• “Why do you laugh? If you were to write a fable for little fishes, you would make them speak like great whales!” The reproof was just. Johnson was in truth conscious of Goldsmith’s superior inventiveness, and of the lighter graces of his pen, but he wished to reduce every thing to his own pompous and oracular style. There are not only *books for children*, but books for all ages and for both sexes. After we grow up to years of discretion, we do not all become equally wise at once. Our own tastes change : the tastes of other individuals are still more different. It was said the other day, that “Thomson’s Seasons would be read while there was a boarding-school girl in the world.” If a thousand volumes were written against *Hervey’s Meditations*, the Meditations would  
• be read when the criticisms were forgotten.

To the illiterate and vain, affectation and verbiage will always pass for fine writing, while the world stands. No woman ever liked Burke, or disliked Goldsmith. It is idle to set up an universal standard. There is a large class who, in spite of themselves, prefer Westall or Angelica Kauffman to Raphael; nor is it fit they should do otherwise. We may come to something like a fixed and exclusive standard of taste, if we confine ourselves to what will please the best judges, meaning thereby persons of the most refined and cultivated minds, and by persons of the most refined and cultivated minds, generally meaning *ourselves!* <sup>1</sup>

To return to the original question. I can conceive of nothing so little or ridiculous as pride. It is a mixture of insensibility and ill-nature, in which it is hard to say which has the largest share. If a man knows or

<sup>1</sup> The books that we like in youth we return to in age, if there is nature and simplicity in them. At what age should Robinson Crusoe be laid aside? I do not think that Don Quixote is a book for children; or at least, they understand it better as they grow up.

exceels in, or has ever studied any two things, I will venture to affirm he will be proud of neither. It is perhaps excusable for a person who is ignorant of all but one thing, to think *that* the sole excellence, and to be full of himself as the possessor. The way to cure him of this folly is to give him something else to be proud of. Vanity is a building that falls to the ground as you widen its foundation, or strengthen the props that should support it. The greater a man is, the less he necessarily thinks of himself; for his knowledge enlarges with his attainments. In himself he feels that he is nothing, a point, a speck in the universe, except as his mind reflects that universe, and as he enters into the infinite variety of truth, beauty, and power contained in it. Let any one be brought up among books, and taught to think words the only things, and he may conceive highly of himself from the proficiency he has made in language and in letters. Let him then be compelled to attempt some other pursuit—painting, for instance—and be made to feel the difficulties, the refinements



of which it is capable, and the number of things of which he was utterly ignorant before, and there will be an end of his pedantry and his pride together. Nothing but the want of comprehension of view or generosity of spirit can make any one fix on his own particular acquirement as the limit of all excellence. No one is (generally speaking) great in more than one thing—if he extends his pursuits, he dissipates his strength—yet in that one thing, how small is the interval between him and the next in merit and reputation to himself! But he thinks nothing of, or scorns or loathes the name of his rival, so that all that the other possesses in common goes for nothing, and the fraction of a difference between them constitutes (in his opinion) the sum and substance of all that is excellent in the universe! Let a man be wise, and then let us ask, will his wisdom make him proud? Let him excel all others in the graces of the mind, has he also those of the body? He has the advantage of fortune, but has he also that of birth; or if he has both, has he health, strength, beauty in a supreme degree? Or.

have not others the same, or does he think all these nothing because he does not possess them? The proud man fancies that there is no one worth regarding but himself : he might as well fancy there is no other being but himself. The one is not a greater stretch of madness than the other. To make pride justifiable, there ought to be but one proud man in the world ; for if any one individual has a right to be so, nobody else has. So far from thinking ourselves superior to all the rest of the species, we cannot be sure that we are above the meanest and most despised individual of it : for he may have some virtue, some excellence, some source of happiness or usefulness within himself, which may redeem all other disadvantages : or even if he is without any such hidden worth, this is not a subject of exultation, but of regret, to any one tinctured with the smallest humanity ; and he who is totally devoid of the latter, cannot have much reason to be proud of any thing else. Arkwright, who invented the spinning-jenny, for many years kept a paltry barber's shop in a provincial town : yet at that

time that wonderful machinery was working in his brain, which has added more to the wealth and resources of his country than all the pride of ancestry or insolence of upstart nobility for the last hundred years. We should be cautious whom we despise. If we do not know them, we can have no right to pronounce a hasty sentence : if we do, they may espy some few defects in us. *No man is a hero to his valet-de-chambre.* What is it then that makes the difference? The dress, and pride. But he is the most of a hero who is least distinguished by the one, and most free from the other. If we enter into conversation upon equal terms with the lowest of the people, unrestrained by circumstance, unawed by interest, we shall find in ourselves but little superiority over them. If we know what they do not, they know what we do not. In general, those who do things for others, know more about them than those for whom they are done. A groom knows more about horses than his master. He rides them too : but the one rides behind, the other before ! Hence the

number of forms and ceremonies that have been invented to keep the magic circle of willing self-importance inviolate. The late King sought but one interview with Dr. Johnson : his present Majesty is never tired of the company of Mr. Croker !

The collision of truth or genius naturally gives a shock to the pride of exalted rank : the great and mighty usually seek out the dregs of mankind, buffoons and flatterers, for their pampered self-love to repose on. Pride soon tires of every thing but its shadow, servility : but how poor a triumph is that which exists only by excluding all rivalry, however remote. He who invites competition (the only test of merit) who challenges fair comparison, and weighs different claims, is alone possessed of manly ambition ; but will not long continue vain or proud. Pride is “a cell of ignorance ; travelling a-bed.” If we look at all out of ourselves, we must see how far short we are of what we would be thought. The man of genius is poor ; the rich man is not a lord :

\* I do not speak of poverty as an absolute evil ; though when

the lord wants to be a king : the king is uneasy to be a tyrant or a God. Yet he alone, who could claim this last character upon earth, gave his life a ransom for others ! The dwarf in the romance, who saw the shadows of the fairest and the mightiest among the sons of men pass before him, that he might assume the shape he liked best, had only his choice of wealth, or beauty, or valour, or power. But could he have clutched them all, and melted them into one essence of

accompanied with luxurious habits and vanity, it is a great one. Even hardships and privations have their use, and give strength and endurance. Labour renders ease delightful—hunger is the best sauce. The peasant, who at noon rests from his weary task under a hawthorn hedge, and eats his slice of coarse bread and cheese or rusty bacon, enjoys more real luxury than the prince with pampered, listless appetite under a canopy of state. Why then does the mind of man pity the former, and envy the latter ? It is because the imagination changes places with others in situation only, not in feeling ; and in fancying ourselves the peasant, we revolt at his homely fare, from not being possessed of his gross taste or keen appetite, while in thinking of the prince, we suppose ourselves to sit down to his delicate viands and sumptuous board, with a relish unabated by long habit and vicious excess. I am not sure whether Mandeville has not given the same answer to this hackneyed question.

pride, the triumph would not have been lasting. Could vanity take all pomp and power to itself, could it, like the rainbow, span the earth, and seem to prop the heavens, after all it would be but the wonder of the ignorant, the pageant of a moment. The fool who dreams that he is great should first forget that he is a man, and before he thinks of being proud, should pray to be mad.—The only great man in modern times, that is, the only man who rose in deeds and fame to the level of antiquity, who might turn his gaze upon himself and wonder at his height, for on him all eyes were fixed as his majestic stature towered above thrones and monuments of renown, died the other day in exile, and in lingering agony; and we still see fellows strutting about the streets, and fancying they are something!

Personal vanity is incompatible with the great and the *ideal*. He who has not seen or thought or read of something finer than himself, has seen or read or thought little; and he who has, will not be always looking in the glass of his own vanity. Hence poets,

artists, and men of genius in general are seldom coxcombs, but often slovens; for they find something out of themselves better worth studying than their own persons. They have an imaginary standard in their minds, with which ordinary features (even their own) will not bear a comparison, and they turn their thoughts another way. If a man had a face like one of Raphael's or Titian's heads, he might be proud of it, but not else; and even then, he would be stared at as a *non-descript* by "the universal English nation." Few persons who have seen the Antinous or the Thescus will be much charmed with their own beauty or symmetry; nor will those who understand the *costume* of the antique or Vandyke's dresses, spend much time in decking themselves out in all the deformity of the prevailing fashion. A coxcomb is his own lay-figure, for want of any better models to employ his time and imagination upon.

There is an inverted sort of pride, the reverse of that egotism that has been above described, and which, because it cannot be every thing, is dissatisfied with every thing. A

person who is liable to this infirmity “thinks nothing done, while any thing remains to be done.” The sanguine egotist prides himself on what he can do or possesses; the morbid egotist despises himself for what he wants, and is ever going out of his way to attempt hopeless and impossible tasks. The effect in either case is not at all owing to reason, but to temperament. The one is as easily depressed by what mortifies his latent ambition, as the other is elated by what flatters his immediate vanity. There are persons whom no success, no advantages, no applause can satisfy; for they dwell only on failure and defeat. They constantly “forget the things that are behind, and press forward to the things that are before.” The greatest and most decided acquisitions would not indemnify them for the smallest deficiency. They go beyond the old motto—*Aut Cæsar, aut nihil*—they not only want to be at the head of whatever they undertake, but if they succeed in that, they immediately want to be at the head of something else, no matter how gross or trivial. The charm that rivets their



affections is not the importance or reputation annexed to the new pursuit, but its novelty or difficulty. That must be a wonderful accomplishment indeed, which baffles their skill—nothing is with them of any value but as it gives scope to their restless activity of mind, their craving after an uneasy and importunate state of excitement. To them the pursuit is every thing, the possession nothing. I have known persons of this stamp, who, with every reason to be satisfied with their success in life, and with the opinion entertained of them by others, despised themselves because they could not do something which they were not bound to do, and which, if they could have done it, would not have added one jot to their respectability, either in their own eyes or those of any one else, the very insignificance of the attainment irritating their impatience, for it is the humour of such dispositions to argue, “If they cannot succeed in what is trifling and contemptible, how should they succeed in any thing else?” If they could make the circuit of the arts and sciences and master them all, they would

take to some mechanical exercise, and if they failed, be as discontented as ever. All that they can do vanishes out of sight the moment it is within their grasp, and "nothing is, but what is not." A poet of this description is ambitious of the thews and muscles of a prize-fighter, and thinks himself nothing without them. A prose-writer would be a fine tennis-player, and is thrown into despair because he is not one, without considering that it requires a whole life devoted to the game to excel in it; and that, even if he could dispense with this apprenticeship, he would still be just as much bound to excel in ropedancing, or horsemanship, or playing at cup and ball like the Indian jugglers, all which is impossible. This feeling is a strange mixture of modesty and pride. We think nothing of what we are, because we cannot be every thing with a wish. Goldsmith was even jealous of beauty in the other sex, and a similar character is attributed to Wharton by Pope:

"Though listening senates hung on all he spoke,  
The club must hail him master of the joke."

Players are for going into the church-

officers in the army turn players. For myself, do what I might, I should think myself a poor creature unless I could beat a boy of ten years old at chuck-farthing, or an elderly gentlewoman at piquet!

The extreme of fastidious discontent and repining is as bad as that of over-weening presumption. We ought to be satisfied if we have succeeded in any one thing, or with having done our best. Any thing more is for health and amusement, and should be resorted to as a source of pleasure, not of fretful impatience, and endless, petty, self-imposed mortification. Perhaps the jealous, uneasy temperament is most favourable to continued exertion and improvement, if it does not lead us to fritter away attention on too many pursuits. By looking out of ourselves, we gain knowledge : by being little satisfied with what we have done, we are less apt to sink into indolence and security. To conclude with a piece of egotism : I never begin one of these *Essays* with a consciousness of having written a line before ; and endeavour to do my best. because I seem hitherto to have done nothing !

## ESSAY XVI.

### ON THE LOOK OF A GENTLEMAN.

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“The nobleman-look? Yes, I know what you mean very well: that look which a nobleman should have, rather than what they have generally now. The Duke of Buckingham (Sheffield<sup>1</sup>) was a genteel man, and had a great deal the look you speak of. Wycherley was a very genteel man, and had the nobleman-look as much as the Duke of Buckingham.”

POPE.

“He instanced it too in Lord Peterborough, Lord Bolingbroke, Lord Hinchinbroke, the Duke of Bolton, and two or three more.”—SPENCER'S *Anecdotes of Pope*.

I HAVE chosen the above motto to a very delicate subject, which in prudence I might let alone. I, however, like the title; and will try, at least, to make a sketch of it.

<sup>1</sup> Quere, Villiers, because in another place it is said, that “when the latter entered the presence-chamber, he attracted all eyes by the handsomeness of his person, and the gracefulness of his demeanour.”

What it is that constitutes the look of a gentleman is more easily felt than described. We all know it when we see it; but we do not know how to account for it, or to explain in what it consists. *Causa latet, res ipsa notissima.* Ease, grace, dignity have been given as the exponents and expressive symbols of this look; but I would rather say, that an habitual self-possession determines the appearance of a gentleman. He should have the complete command not only over his countenance, but over his limbs and motions. In other words, he should discover in his air and manner a voluntary power over his whole body, which with every inflection of it, should be under the control of his will. It must be evident that he looks and does as he likes, without any restraint, confusion, or awkwardness. He is, in fact, master of his person, as the professor of any art or science is of a particular instrument; he directs it to what use he pleases and intends. Wherever this power and facility appear, we recognise the look and deportment of the gentleman, that is, of a person who by his habits and situation

in life, and in his ordinary intercourse with society, has had little else to do than to study those movements, and that carriage of the body, which were accompanied with most satisfaction to himself, and were calculated to excite the approbation of the beholder. Ease, it might be observed, is not enough ; dignity is too much. There must be a certain *retenu*, a conscious decorum added to the first,—and a certain “ familiarity of regard, quenching the austere countenance of control,” in the second, to answer to our conception of this character. Perhaps propriety is as near a word as any to denote the manners of the gentleman ; elegance is necessary to the fine gentleman ; dignity is proper to noblemen ; and majesty to kings !

Wherever this constant and decent subjection of the body to the mind is visible in the customary actions of walking, sitting, riding, standing, speaking, *etc.* we draw the same conclusion as to the individual—whatever may be the impediments or unavoidable defects in the machine, of which he has the management. A man may have a mean or

disagreeable exterior, may halt in his gait; or have lost the use of half his limbs; and yet he may shew this habitual attention to what is graceful and becoming in the use he makes of all the power he has left—in the “nice conduct” of the most unpromising and impracticable figure. A hump-backed or deformed man does not necessarily look like a clown or a mechanic; on the contrary, from his care in the adjustment of his appearance, and his desire to remedy his defects, he for the most part acquires something of the look of a gentleman. The common nick-name of *My Lord*, applied to such persons, has allusion to this—to their circumspect deportment, and tacit resistance to vulgar prejudice. Lord Ogleby, in the *Clandestine Marriage*, is as crazy a piece of elegance and refinement, even after he is “wound up for the day,” as can well be imagined; yet in the hands of a genuine actor, his tottering step, his twitches of the gout, his unsuccessful attempts at youth and gaiety take nothing from the nobleman. He has the *ideal* model in his mind, resents his deviations from it with proper horror, recovers himself

from any ungraceful action as soon as possible; does all he can with his limited means, and fails in his just pretensions, not from inadvertence, but necessity. Sir Joseph Banks, who was almost bent double, retained to the last the look of a privy-counsellor. There was all the firmness and dignity that could be given by the sense of his own importance to so distorted and disabled a trunk. Sir Charles Bunbury, as he saunters down St. James's-street, with a large slouched hat, a lack-lustre eye and aquiline nose, an old shabby drab-coloured coat, buttoned across his breast without a cape—with old top-boots, and his hands in his waistcoat or breeches' pockets, as if he were strolling along his own garden-walks, or over the turf at Newmarket, after having made his bets secure—presents nothing very dazzling, or graceful, or dignified to the imagination; though you can tell infallibly at the first glance, or even a bowshot off, that he is a gentleman of the first water (the same that sixty years ago married the beautiful Lady Sarah L-nn-x, with whom the king was in love). What is the clue to this mystery?



It is evident that his person costs him no more trouble than an old glove. His limbs are, from long practice, left to take care of themselves; they move of their own accord; he does not strut or stand on tip-toe to shew

——“ how tall

His person is above them all ; ”——

but he seems to find his own level, and wherever he is, to slide into his place naturally; he is equally at home among lords or gamblers; nothing can discompose his fixed serenity of look and purpose; there is no mark of superciliousness about him, nor does it appear as if any thing could meet his eye to startle or throw him off his guard; he neither avoids nor courts notice; but the *archaism* of his dress may be understood to denote a lingering partiality for the costume of the last age, and something like a prescriptive contempt for the finery of this. The old one-eyed Duke of Queensberry is another example that I might quote. As he sat in his bow-window in Piccadilly, erect and emaciated, he seemed like a nobleman framed and glazed, or a well-dressed mummy of the court of George II.

We have few of these precious specimens of the gentleman or nobleman-look now remaining; other considerations have set aside the exclusive importance of the character, and of course, the jealous attention to the outward expression of it. Where we oftenest meet with it now-a-days, is, perhaps, in the butlers in old families, or the valets and "gentlemen's gentlemen" of the younger branches. The sleek pursy gravity of the one answers to the stately air of some of their *quondam* masters; and the flippancy and finery of our old-fashioned beaux, having been discarded by the heirs to the title and estate, have been retained by their lackeys. The late Admiral Byron (I have heard Northcote say) had a butler, or steward, who, from constantly observing his master, had so learned to mimic him—the look, the manner, the voice, the bow were so alike—he was so "subdued to the very quality of his lord"—that it was difficult to distinguish them apart. Our modern footmen, as we see them fluttering and lounging in lobbies or at the doors of ladies' carriages, bedizened in lace and powder, with ivory-

headed cane and embroidered gloves, give one the only idea of the fine gentlemen of former periods, as they are still occasionally represented on the stage; and indeed our theatrical heroes, who top such parts, might be supposed to have copied, as a last resource, from the heroes of the shoulder-knot. We also sometimes meet with a straggling personation of this character, got up in common life from pure romantic enthusiasm, and on absolutely ideal principles. I recollect a well-grown comely haberdasher, who made a practice of walking every day from Bishop's-gate-street to Pall-mall and Bond-street with the undaunted air and strut of a general-officer; and also a prim undertaker, who regularly tendered his person, whenever the weather would permit, from the neighbourhood of Camberwell into the favourite promenades of the city, with a mincing gait that would have become a gentleman-usher of the black-rod. What a strange infatuation to live in a dream of being taken for what one is not—in deceiving others, and at the same time ourselves; for no doubt these persons

believed that they thus appeared to the world in their true characters, and that their assumed pretensions did no more than justice to their real merits.

*“Dress makes the man, and want of it the fellow;  
The rest is all but leather and prunella!”*

I confess, however, that I admire this look of a gentleman, more when it rises from the level of common life, and bears the stamp of intellect, than when it is formed out of the mould of adventitious circumstances. I think more highly of Wycherley than I do of Lord Hinchinbroke, for looking like a lord. In the one, it was the effect of native genius, grace, and spirit; in the other, comparatively speaking, of pride or custom. A visitor complimenting Voltaire on the growth and flourishing condition of some trees in his grounds, “Aye,” said the French wit, “they have nothing else to do!” A lord has nothing to do but to look like a lord : our comic poet had something else to do, and did it !<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wycherley was a great favourite with the Duchess of Cleveland.

Though the disadvantages of nature or accident do not act as obstacles to the look of a gentleman, those of education and employment do. A shoe-maker, who is bent in two over his daily task; a tailor who sits cross-legged all day; a ploughman, who wears clog-shoes over the furrowed miry soil, and can hardly drag his feet after him; a scholar who has pored all his life over books—are not likely to possess that natural freedom and ease, or to pay that strict attention to personal appearances, that the look of a gentleman implies. I might add, that a man-milliner behind a counter, who is compelled to shew every mark of complaisance to his customers, but hardly expects common civility from them in return; or a sheriff's officer, who has a consciousness of power, but none of goodwill to or from any body, are equally remote from the *beau idéal* of this character. A man who is awkward from bashfulness is a clown; as one who is shewing off a number of impertinent airs and graces at every turn, is a coxcomb, or an upstart. Mere awkwardness or rusticity of behaviour may arise,

either from want of presence of mind in the company of our *betters*, (the commonest hind goes about his regular business without any of the *mauvaise honte*) from a deficiency of breeding, as it is called, in not having been taught certain fashionable accomplishments —or from unremitting application to certain sorts of mechanical labour, unfitting the body for general or indifferent uses. (That vulgarity which proceeds from a total disregard of decorum, and want of careful control over the different actions of the body—such as loud speaking, boisterous gesticulations, *etc.* is rather rudeness and violence, than awkwardness or uneasy restraint.) Now the gentleman is free from all these causes of ungraceful demeanour. He is independent in his circumstances, and is used to enter into society on equal terms; he is taught the modes of address and forms of courtesy most commonly practised and most proper to ingratiate him into the good opinion of those he associates with; and he is relieved from the necessity of following any of those laborious trades or callings which cramp, strain, and

distort the human frame. He is not bound to do any one earthly thing; to use any exertion, or put himself in any posture, that is not perfectly easy and graceful, agreeable and becoming. Neither is he (at the present day) required to excel in any art or science, game or exercise. He is supposed qualified to dance a minuet, not to dance on the tight rope—to stand upright, not to stand on his head. He has only to sacrifice to the Graces. Alcibiades threw away a flute, because the playing on it discomposed his features. Take the fine gentleman out of the common boarding-school or drawing-room accomplishments, and set him to any ruder or more difficult task, and he will make but a sorry figure. Ferdinand in the *Tempest*, when he is put by Prospero to carry logs of wood, does not strike us as a very heroical character, though he loses nothing of the king's son. If a young gallant of the first fashion were asked to shoe a horse, or hold a plough, or fell a tree, he would make a very ridiculous business of the first experiment. I saw a set of young naval officers, very genteel-looking young men,

playing at rackets not long ago, and it is impossible to describe the uncouthness of their motions and unaccountable contrivances for hitting the ball. Something effeminate as well as common-place, then, enters into the composition of the gentleman : he is a little of the *petit-maitre* in his pretensions. He is only graceful and accomplished in those things to which he has paid almost his whole attention, such as the carriage of his body, and adjustment of his dress ; and to which he is of sufficient importance in the scale of society to attract the idle attention of others.

A man's manner of presenting himself in company is but a superficial test of his real qualifications. Serjeant Atkinson, we are assured by Fielding, would have marched, at the head of his platoon, up to a masked battery, with less apprehension than he came into a room full of pretty women. So we may sometimes see persons look foolish enough on entering a party, or returning a salutation, who instantly feel themselves at home and recover all their self-possession, as soon as any of that sort of conversation begins from



which nine-tenths of the company retire in the extremest trepidation, lest they should betray their ignorance or incapacity. A high spirit and stubborn pride are often accompanied with an unprepossessing and unpretending appearance. The greatest heroes do not discover it by their looks. There are individuals of a nervous habit, who might be said to abhor their own persons, and to startle at their own appearance, as the peacock tries to hide its legs. They are always shy, uncomfortable, restless ; and all their actions are, in a manner, at cross-purposes with themselves. This, of course, destroys the look we are speaking of, from the want of ease and self-confidence. There is another sort who have too much negligence of manner and contempt for formal punctilios. They take their full swing in whatever they are about, and make it seem almost necessary to get out of their way. Perhaps something of this bold, licentious, slovenly, lounging character may be objected by a fastidious eye to the appearance of Lord Castlereagh. It might be said of him, without disparagement, that he looks

more like a lord than like a gentleman. We see nothing petty or finical, assuredly—nothing hard-bound or reined-in—but a flowing outline, a broad free style. He sits in the House of Commons, with his hat slouched over his forehead, and a sort of stoop in his shoulders, as if he cowered over his antagonists, like a bird of prey over its quarry, “hatching vain empires.” There is an irregular grandeur about him, an unwieldy power, loose, disjointed, “voluminous and vast,” coiled up in the folds of its own purposes, cold, death-like, smooth and smiling,—that is neither quite at ease with itself, nor safe for others to approach! On the other hand, there is the Marquis Wellesley, a jewel of a man. He advances into his place in the House of Lords, with head erect, and his best foot foremost. The star sparkles on his breast, and the garter is seen bound tight below his knee. It might be thought that he still trod a measure on soft carpets, and was surrounded not only by spiritual and temporal lords, but

“Stores of ladies, whose bright eyes  
Rain influence, and judge the prize.”

The chivalrous spirit that shines through him, the air of gallantry in his personal as well as rhetorical appeals to the House, glances a partial lustre on the Woolsack as he addresses it; and makes Lord Erskine raise his sunken head from a dream of transient popularity. His heedless vanity throws itself unblushingly on the unsuspecting candour of his hearers, and ravishes mute admiration. You would almost guess of this nobleman beforehand that he was a Marquis—something higher than an earl, and less important than a duke. Nature has just fitted him for the niche he fills in the scale of rank or title. He is a finished miniature-picture set in brilliants: Lord Castlereagh might be compared to a loose sketch in oil, not properly hung. The character of the one is ease, of the other, elegance. Elegance is something more than ease; it is more than a freedom from awkwardness or restraint. It implies, I conceive, a precision, a polish, a sparkling effect, spirited yet delicate, which is perfectly exemplified in Lord Wellesley's face and figure.

The greatest contrast to this little lively

nobleman was the late Lord Stanhope. Tall above his peers, he presented an appearance something between a Patagonian chief and one of the Long Parliament. With his long black hair, "unkempt and wild"—his black clothes, lank features, strange antics, and screaming voice, he was the Orson of debate.

"A Satyr that comes staring from the woods,  
Cannot at first speak like an orator."

Yet he was both an orator and a wit in his way. His harangues were an odd jumble of logic and mechanics, of the Statutes at large and Joe Miller jests, of stern principle and sly humour, of shrewdness and absurdity, of method and madness. What is more extraordinary, he was an honest man. He was out of his place in the House of Lords. He particularly delighted, in his eccentric onsets, to make havoc of the bench of bishops. "I like," said he, "to argue with one of my lords the bishops; and the reason why I do so is, that I generally have the best of the argument." He was altogether a different man from Lord Eldon; yet his lordship "gave

him good œillades," as he broke a jest, or argued a moot-point; and while he spoke, smiles, roguish twinkles, glittered in the Chancellor's eyes.

The look of the gentleman, "the nobleman look," is little else than the reflection of the looks of the world. We smile at those who smile upon us : we are gracious to those who pay their court to us : we naturally acquire confidence and ease when all goes well with us, when we are encouraged by the blandishments of fortune, and the good opinion of mankind. A whole street bowing regularly to a man every time he rides out, may teach him how to pull off his hat in return, without supposing a particular genius for bowing (more than for governing or any thing else) born in the family. It has been observed that persons who sit for their pictures improve the character of their countenances, from the desire they have to procure the most favourable representation of themselves. "Tell me, pray good Mr. Carmine, when you come to the eyes, that I may call up a look," says the Alderman's wife, in Foote's farce of Taste.

Ladies grow handsome by looking at themselves in the glass, and heightening the agreeable air and expression of features they so much admire there. So the favourites of fortune adjust themselves in the glass of fashion and the flattering illusions of public opinion. Again, the expression of face in the gentleman, or thorough-bred man of the world is not that of refinement so much as of flexibility ; of sensibility or enthusiasm, so much as of indifference :—it argues presence of mind, rather than enlargement of ideas. In this it differs from the heroic and philosophical look. Instead of an intense unity of purpose, wound up to some great occasion, it is dissipated and frittered down into a number of evanescent expressions, fitted for every variety of unimportant occurrences : instead of the expansion of general thought or intellect, you trace chiefly the little, trite, cautious, moveable lines of conscious, but concealed self-complacency. If Raphael had painted St. Paul as a gentleman, what a figure he would have made of the great Apostle of the Gentiles—occupied with himself, not

carried away, raised, inspired with his subject—insinuating his doctrines into his audience, not launching them from him with the tongues of the Holy Spirit, and with looks of fiery, scorching zeal! Gentlemen luckily can afford to sit for their own portraits : painters do not trouble them to sit as studies for history. What a difference is there in this respect between a Madonna of Raphael, and a lady of fashion, even by Vandyke : the former refined and elevated, the latter light and trifling, with no emanation of soul, no depth of feeling,—each arch expression playing on the surface, and passing into any other at pleasure,—no one thought having its full scope, but checked by some other,—soft, careless, insincere, pleased, affected, amiable! The French physiognomy is more cut up and subdivided into petty lines and sharp angles than any other : it does not want for subtlety, or an air of gentility, which last it often has in a remarkable degree,—but it is the most unpoetical and the least picturesque of all others. I cannot explain what I mean by this variable telegraphic machinery of polite expression

better than by an obvious allusion. Every one by walking the streets of London (or any other populous city) acquires a walk which is easily distinguished from that of strangers; a quick flexibility of movement, a smart jerk, an aspiring and confident tread, and an air as if on the alert to keep the line of march; but for all that, there is not much grace or grandeur in this local strut: you see the person is not a country-bumpkin, but you would not say, he is a hero or a sage—because he is a *cockney*. So it is in passing through the artificial and thickly peopled scenes of life. You get the look of a man of the world: you rub off the pedant and the clown; but you do not make much progress in wisdom or virtue, or in the characteristic expression of either.

The character of a gentleman (I take it) may be explained nearly thus:—A blackguard (*un vaurien*) is a fellow who does not care whom he offends:—a clown is a blockhead who does not know when he offends:—a gentleman is one who understands and shews every mark of deference to the claims of self-



love in others, and exacts it in return from them. Politeness and the pretensions to the character in question have reference almost entirely to this reciprocal manifestation of good-will and good opinion towards each other in casual society. Morality regulates our sentiments and conduct as they have a connection with ultimate and important consequences :—manners, properly speaking, regulate our words and actions in the routine of personal intercourse. They have little to do with real kindness of intention, or practical services, or disinterested sacrifices ; but they put on the garb, and mock the appearance of these, in order to prevent a breach of the peace, and to smooth and varnish over the discordant materials, when any number of individuals are brought in contact together. The conventional compact of good manners does not reach beyond the moment and the company. Say, for instance, that the *rabble*, the labouring and industrious part of the community, are taken up with supplying their own wants, and pining over their own hardships—scrambling for what they can get,

and not refining on any of their pleasures, or troubling themselves about the fastidious pretensions of others : again, there are philosophers who are busied in the pursuit of truth, or patriots who are active for the good of their country ; but here, we will suppose, are a knot of people got together, who, having no serious wants of their own, with leisure and independence, and caring little about abstract truth or practical utility, are met for no mortal purpose but to say and to do all manner of obliging things, to pay the greatest possible respect, and shew the most delicate and flattering attentions to one another. The politest set of gentlemen and ladies in the world can do no more than this. The laws that regulate this species of select and fantastic society are conformable to its ends and origin. The fine gentleman or lady must not, on any account, say a rude thing to the persons present, but may turn them into the utmost ridicule the instant they are gone : nay, not to do so is sometimes considered as an indirect slight to the party that remains. You must compliment your

bitterest foe to his face, and may slander your dearest friend behind his back. The last may be immoral, but it is not unmannerly. The gallant maintains his title to this character by treating every woman he meets with the same marked and unremitting attention as if she was his mistress : the courtier treats every man with the same professions of esteem and kindness as if he were an accomplice with him in some plot against mankind. Of course, these professions, made only to please, go for nothing in practice. To insist on them afterwards as literal obligations, would be to betray an ignorance of this kind of interlude or masquerading in real life. To ruin your friend at play is not inconsistent with the character of a gentleman and a man of honour, if it is done with civility; though to warn him of his danger, so as to imply a doubt of his judgment, or interference with his will, would be to subject yourself to be run through the body with a sword. It is that which wounds the self-love of the individual that is offensive—that which flatters it that is welcome—however salutary

the one, or however fatal the other may be. A habit of plain-speaking is totally contrary to the tone of good-breeding. You must prefer the opinion of the company to your own, and even to truth. I doubt whether a gentleman must not be of the Established Church, and a Tory. A true cavalier can only be a martyr to prejudice or fashion. A Whig lord appears to me as great an anomaly as a patriot king. A sectary is sour and unsociable. A philosopher is quite out of the question. He is in the clouds, and had better not be let down on the floor in a basket, to play the blockhead. He is sure to commit himself in good company—and by dealing always in abstractions, and driving at generalities, to offend against the three proprieties of time, place, and person. Authors are angry, loud, and vehement in argument: the man of more refined breeding, who has been “all tranquillity and smiles,” goes away, and tries to ruin the antagonist whom he could not vanquish in a dispute. The manners of a court and of polished life are by no means downright, straight-forward, but the contrary. They have something dra-

matic in them ; each person plays an assumed part ; the affected, overstrained politeness and suppression of real sentiment lead to concealed irony and a spirit of satire and raillery ; and hence we may account for the perfection of the genteel comedy of the century before the last, when poets were allowed to mingle in the court-circles, and took their cue from the splendid ring

“Of mimic statesmen and their merry king.”

The essence of this sort of conversation and intercourse, both on and off the stage, has somehow since evaporated ; the disguises of royalty, nobility, gentry have been in some measure seen through : we have become individually of little importance, compared with greater objects, in the eyes of our neighbours, and even in our own : abstract topics, not personal pretensions, are the order of the day ; so that what remains of the character we have been talking of, is chiefly exotic and provincial, and may be seen still flourishing in country-places, in a wholesome state of vegetable decay !

A man may have the manners of a gentleman without having the look, and he may have the character of a gentleman, in a more abstracted point of view, without the manners. The feelings of a gentleman, in this higher sense, only denote a more refined humanity—a spirit delicate in itself, and unwilling to offend, either in the greatest or the smallest things. This may be coupled with absence of mind, with ignorance of forms, and frequent blunders. But the will is good. The spring of gentle offices and true regards is untainted. A person of this stamp blushes at an impropriety he was guilty of twenty years before, though he is, perhaps, liable to repeat it to-morrow. He never forgives himself for even a slip of the tongue, that implies an assumption of superiority over any one. In proportion to the concessions made to him, he lowers his demands. He gives the wall to a beggar :<sup>1</sup> but does not always bow to

<sup>1</sup> The writer of this Essay once saw a Prince of the Blood pull off his hat to every one in the street, till he came to the beggarman that swept the crossing. This was a nice distinction. Farther, it was a distinction that the writer of

great men. This class of character has been called "God Almighty's gentlemen." There are not a great many of them.—The *late* G. Dyer was one; for we understand that that gentleman was not able to survive some ill-disposed person's having asserted of him, that he had mistaken Lord Castlereagh for the Author of *Waverley*!

this Essay would not make to be a Prince of the Blood. Perhaps, however, a question might be started in the manner of Montaigne, whether the beggar did not pull off his hat in quality of asking charity, and not as a mark of respect. Now a Prince may decline giving charity, though he is obliged to return a civility. If he does not, he may be treated with disrespect another time, and that is an alternative he is bound to prevent. Any other person might set up such a plea, but the person to whom a whole street had been bowing just before.

## ESSAY XVII,

### ON READING OLD BOOKS.

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I HATE to read new books. There are twenty or thirty volumes that I have read over and over again, and these are the only ones that I have any desire ever to read at all. It was a long time before I could bring myself to sit down to the Tales of My Landlord, but now that author's works have made a considerable addition to my scanty library. I am told that some of Lady Morgan's are good, and have been recommended to look into Anastasius; but I have not yet ventured upon that task. A lady, the other day, could not re-frain from expressing her surprise to a friend, who said he had been reading Delphine:—she asked—“If it had not been published some time back?” Women judge of books as they



do of fashions or complexions, which are admired only "in their newest gloss." That is not my way. I am not one of those who trouble the circulating libraries much, or pester the booksellers for mail-coach copies of standard periodical publications. I cannot say that I am greatly addicted to black-letter, but I profess myself well versed in the marble bindings of Andrew Millar, in the middle of the last century; nor does my taste revolt at Thurloe's State Papers, in Russia leather; or an ample impression of Sir William Temple's Essays, with a portrait after Sir Godfrey Kneller in front. I do not think altogether the worse of a book for having survived the author a generation or two. I have more confidence in the dead than the living. Contemporary writers may generally be divided into two classes—one's friends or one's foes. Of the first we are compelled to think too well, and of the last we are disposed to think too ill, to receive much genuine pleasure from the perusal, or to judge fairly of the merits of either. One candidate for literary fame, who happens to be of our acquaintance, writes finely, and

like a man of genius; but unfortunately has a foolish face, which spoils a delicate passage : —another inspires us with the highest respect for his personal talents and character, but does not quite come up to our expectations in print. All these contradictions and petty details interrupt the calm current of our reflections. If you want to know what any of the authors were who lived before our time, and are still objects of anxious inquiry, you have only to look into their works. But the dust and smoke and noise of modern literature have nothing in common with the pure, silent air of immortality.

When I take up a work that I have read before (the oftener the better) I know what I have to expect. The satisfaction is not lessened by being anticipated. When the entertainment is altogether new, I sit down to it as I should to a strange dish—turn and pick out a bit here and there, and am in doubt what to think of the composition. There is a want of confidence and security to second appetite. New-fangled books are also like made-dishes in this respect, that they are

generally little else than hashes and *rifaccimentos* of what has been served up entire and in a more natural state at other times. Besides, in thus turning to a well-known author, there is not only an assurance that my time will not be thrown away, or my palate nauseated with the most insipid or vilest trash, —but I shake hands with, and look an old, tried, and valued friend in the face,—compare notes, and chat the hours away. It is true, we form dear friendships with such ideal guests—dearer, alas! and more lasting, than those with our most intimate acquaintance. In reading a book which is an old favourite with me (say the first novel I ever read) I not only have the pleasure of imagination and of a critical relish of the work, but the pleasures of memory added to it. It recalls the same feelings and associations which I had in first reading it, and which I can never have again in any other way. Standard productions of this kind are links in the chain of our conscious being. They bind together the different scattered divisions of our personal identity. They are land-marks and guides in our

journey through life. They are pegs and loops on which we can hang up, or from which we can take down, at pleasure, the wardrobe of a moral imagination, the relics of our best affections, the tokens and records of our happiest hours. They are “for thoughts and for remembrance !” They are like Fortunatus’s Wishing-Cap—they give us the best riches—those of Fancy ; and transport us, not over half the globe, but (which is better) over half our lives, at a word’s notice !

My father Shandy solaced himself with *Bruscambille*. Give me for this purpose a volume of *Peregrine Pickle* or *Tom Jones*. Open either of them any where—at the *Memoirs of Lady Vane*, or the adventures at the masquerade with *Lady Bellaston*, or the disputes between *Thwackum* and *Square*, or the escape of *Molly Seagrim*, or the incident of *Sophia* and her muff, or the edifying prolixity of her aunt’s lecture—and there I find the same delightful, busy, bustling scene as ever, and feel myself the same as when I was first introduced into the midst of it. Nay, sometimes the sight of an odd volume of these

good old English authors on a stall, or the name lettered on the back among others on the shelves of a library, answers the purpose, revives the whole train of ideas, and sets "the puppets dallying." Twenty years are struck off the list, and I am a child again. A sage philosopher, who was not a very wise man, said, that he should like very well to be young again, if he could take his experience along with him. The ingenious person did not seem to be aware, by the gravity of his remark, that the great advantage of being young is to be without this weight of experience, which he would fain place upon the shoulders of youth, and which never comes too late with years. Oh! what a privilege to be able to let this hump, like Christian's burthen, drop from off one's back, and transport one's-self, by the help of a little musty duodecimo, to the time when "ignorance was bliss," and when we first got a peep at the raree-show of the world, through the glass of fiction—gazing at mankind, as we do at wild beasts in a menagerie, through the bars of their cages—or at cu-

riposities in a museum, that we must not touch! For myself, not only are the old ideas of the contents of the work brought back to my mind in all their vividness, but the old associations of the faces and persons of those I then knew, as they were in their life-time—the place where I sat to read the volume, the day when I got it, the feeling of the air, the fields, the sky—return, and all my early impressions with them. This is better to me—those places, those times, those persons, and those feelings that come across me as I retrace the story and devour the page, are to me better far than the wet sheets of the last new novel from the Ballantyne press, to say nothing of the Minerva press in Leadenhall-street. It is like visiting the scenes of early youth. I think of the time “when I was in my father’s house, and my path ran down with butter and honey,”—when I was a little, thoughtless child, and had no other wish or care but to con my daily task, and be happy!—Tom Jones, I remember, was the first work that broke the spell. It came down in numbers once a fortnight, in Cooke’s pocket-

edition, embellished with cuts. I had hitherto read only in school-books, and a tiresome ecclesiastical history (with the exception of Mrs. Radcliffe's *Romance of the Forest*): but this had a different relish with it,—“sweet in the mouth,” though not “bitter in the belly.” It smacked of the world I lived in, and in which I was to live—and shewed me groups, “gay creatures” not “of the element,” but of the earth; not “living in the clouds,” but travelling the same road that I did;—some that had passed on before me, and others that might soon overtake me. My heart had palpitated at the thoughts of a boarding-school ball, or gala-day at Midsummer or Christmas : but the world I had found out in Cooke's edition of the *British Novelists* was to me a dance through life, a perpetual gala-day. The six-penny numbers of this work regularly contrived to leave off just in the middle of a sentence, and in the nick of a story, where Tom Jones discovers Square behind the blanket; or where Parson Adams, in the inextricable confusion of events, very undesignedly gets to bed to Mrs. Slip-slop.

Let me caution the reader against this impression of Joseph Andrews; for there is a picture of Fanny in it which he should not set his heart on, lest he should never meet with any thing like it: or if he should, it would, perhaps, be better for him that he had not. It was just like — — ! With what eagerness I used to look forward to the next number, and open the prints! Ah! never again shall I feel the enthusiastic delight with which I gazed at the figures, and anticipated the story and adventures of Major Bath and Commodore Trunnion, of Trim and my Uncle Toby, of Don Quixote and Sancho and Dapple, of Gil Blas and Dame Lorenza Sephora, of Laura and the fair Lucretia, whose lips open and shut like buds of roses. To what nameless ideas did they give rise,—with what airy delights I filled up the outlines, as I hung in silence over the page!—Let me still recall them that they may breathe fresh life into me, and that I may live that birthday of thought and romantic pleasure over again! Talk of the *ideal*! This is the only true ideal—the heavenly tints of Fancy reflected



in the bubbles that float upon the spring-tide of human life.

“ Oh! Memory! shield me from the world’s poor strife,  
And give those scenes thine everlasting life!”

The paradox with which I set out is, I hope, less startling than it was; the reader will, by this time, have been let into my secret. Much about the same time, or I believe rather earlier, I took a particular satisfaction in reading Chubb’s Tracts, and I often think I will get them again to wade through. There is a high gusto of polemical divinity in them; and you fancy that you hear a club of shoemakers at Salisbury, debating a disputable text from one of St. Paul’s Epistles in a workmanlike style, with equal shrewdness and pertinacity. I cannot say much for my metaphysical studies, into which I launched shortly after with great ardour, so as to make a toil of a pleasure. I was presently entangled in the briars and thorns of subtle distinctions—of “fate, free-will, foreknowledge absolute,” though I cannot add that “in their wandering maze I found no end;” for I did

arrive at some very satisfactory and potent conclusions; nor will I go so far, however ungrateful the subject might seem, as to exclaim with Marlowe's Faustus—"Would I had never seen Wittenberg, never read book"—that is, never studied such authors as Hartley, Hume, Berkeley, *etc.* Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding is, however, a work from which I never derived either pleasure or profit; and Hobbes, dry and powerful as he is, I did not read till long afterwards. I read a few poets, which did not much hit my taste, for I would have the reader understand, I am deficient in the faculty of imagination; but I fell early upon French romances and philosophy, and devoured them tooth-and-nail. Many a dainty repast have I made of the New Eloise;—the description of the kiss; the excursion on the water; the letter of St. Preux, recalling the time of their first loves; and the account of Julia's death; these I read over and over again with unspeakable delight and wonder. Some years after, when I met with this work again, I found I had lost nearly my whole relish for

it, (except some few parts) and was, I remember, very much mortified with the change in my taste, which I sought to attribute to the smallness and gilt edges of the edition I had bought, and its being perfumed with rose-leaves. Nothing could exceed the gravity, the solemnity with which I carried home and read the Dedication to the Social Contract, with some other pieces of the same author, which I had picked up at a stall in a coarse leathern cover. Of the Confessions I have spoken elsewhere, and may repeat what I have said—"Sweet is the dew of their memory, and pleasant the balm of their recollection!" Their beauties are not "scattered like stray-gifts o'er the earth," but sown thick on the page, rich and rare. I wish I had never read the Emilius, or read it with less implicit faith. I had no occasion to pamper my natural aversion to affectation or pretence, by romantic and artificial means. I had better have formed myself on the model of Sir Fopling Flutter. There is a class of persons whose virtues and most shining qualities sink in, and are concealed by, an absorbent ground

of modesty and reserve ; and such a one I do, without vanity, profess myself. \* Now these are the very persons who are likely to attach themselves to the character of Emilius, and of whom it is sure to be the bane. This dull, phlegmatic, retiring humour is not in a fair way to be corrected, but confirmed and rendered desperate by being in that work held up as an object of imitation, as an example of simplicity and magnanimity—by coming upon us with all the recommendations of novelty, surprise, and superiority to the prejudices of the world—by being stuck upon a pedestal, made amiable, dazzling, a *leurre de dupe* ! The reliance on solid worth which it inculcates, the preference of sober truth to gaudy tinsel, hangs like a mill-stone round the neck of the imagination—“a load to sink a navy”—impedes our progress, and blocks up every prospect in life. A man, to get on,

\* Nearly the same sentiment was wittily and happily expressed by a friend, who had some lottery-puffs, which he had been employed to write, returned on his hands for their too great severity of thought and classical terseness of style, and who observed on that occasion, that “Modest merit never can succeed !”

to be successful, conspicuous, applauded, should not retire upon the centre of his conscious resources, but be always at the circumference of appearances. He must envelop himself in a halo of mystery—he must ride in an equipage of opinion—he must walk with a train of self-conceit following him—he must not strip himself to a buff-jerkin, to the doublet and hose of his real merits, but must surround himself with a *cortege* of prejudices, like the signs of the Zodiac—he must seem any thing but what he is, and then he may pass for any thing he pleases. The world love to be amused by hollow professions, to be deceived by flattering appearances, to live in a state of hallucination; and can forgive every thing but the plain, downright, simple honest truth—such as we see it chalked out in the character of Emilius.—To return from this digression, which is a little out of place here.

Books have in a great measure lost their power over me; nor can I revive the same interest in them as formerly. I perceive when a thing is good, rather than feel it. It is true,

Marcian Colonna is a dainty book;

and the reading of Mr. Keats's *Eve of Saint Agnes* lately made me regret that I was not young again. The beautiful and tender images there conjured up, "come like shadows—so depart." The "tiger-moth's wings," which he has spread over his rich poetic blazonry, just flit across my fancy; the gorgeous twilight window which he has painted over again in his verse, to me "blushes" almost in vain "with blood of queens and kings." I know how I should have felt at one time in reading such passages; and that is all. The sharp luscious flavour, the fine *aroma* is fled, and nothing but the stalk, the bran, the husk of literature is left. If any one were to ask me what I read now, I might answer with my Lord Hamlet in the play—"Words, words, words."—"What is the matter?"—"Nothing!"—They have scarce a meaning. But it was not always so. There was a time when to my thinking, every word was a flower or a pearl, like those which dropped from the mouth of the little peasant-girl in the fairy tale, or like those that fall from the great preacher in the Caledonian

Chapel ! I drank of the stream of knowledge that tempted, but did not mock my lips, as of the river of life freely. How eagerly I slaked my thirst of German sentiment, “as the hart that panteth for the water-springs ;” how I bathed and revelled, and added my floods of tears to Goëthe’s Sorrows of Werter, and to Schiller’s Robbers—

Giving my stock of more to that which had too much !

I read, and assented with all my soul to Coleridge’s fine Sonnet, beginning—

“ Schiller ! that hour I would have wish’d to die,  
If through the shuddering midnight I had sent,  
From the dark dungeon of the tow’r time-rent,  
That fearful voice, a famish’d father’s cry !”

I believe I may date my insight into the mysteries of poetry from the commencement of my acquaintance with the authors of the Lyrical Ballads ; at least, my discrimination of the higher sorts—not my predilection for such writers as Goldsmith or Pope : nor do I imagine they will say I got my liking for our Novelists or Comic Writers,—for the characters of Valentine, Tattle, or Miss Prue. from them. If so, I must have got from them

what they never had themselves. In points where poetic diction and conception are concerned, I may be at a loss, and liable to be imposed upon : but in forming an estimate of passages relating to common life and manners, I cannot think I am a plagiarist from any man. I there “know my cue without a prompter.” I may say of such studies—*Intus et in cute*. I am just able to admire those literal touches of observation and description, which persons of loftier pretensions overlook and despise. I think I comprehend something of the characteristic part of Shakespear ; and in him indeed, all is characteristic, even the nonsense and poetry. I believe it was the celebrated Sir Humphrey Davy who used to say, that Shakespear was rather a metaphysician than a poet. At any rate, it was not ill said. I wish that I had sooner known the dramatic writers contemporary with Shakespear ; for in looking them over about a year ago, I almost revived my old passion for reading, and my old delight in books, though they were very nearly new to me. The Periodical Essayists I read long ago. The Spectator I liked ex-



tremely : but the *Tatler* took my fancy most. I read the others soon after, the *Rambler*, the *Adventurer*, the *World*, the *Connoisseur* : I was not sorry to get to the end of them, and have no desire to go regularly through them again. I consider myself a thorough adept in Richardson. I like the longest of his novels best, and think no part of them tedious ; nor should I ask to have any thing better to do than to read them from beginning to end, to take them up when I chose, and lay them down when I was tired, in some old family mansion in the country, till every word and syllable relating to the bright *Clarissa*, the divine *Clementina*, the beautiful *Pamela*, “with every trick and line of their sweet favour,” were once more “graven in my heart’s tables.”<sup>1</sup> I have a sneaking kindness for Mackenzie’s *Julia de Roubigné*—for the deserted mansion, and straggling gilliflowers on the mouldering

<sup>1</sup> During the peace of Amiens, a young English officer, of the name of Lovelace, was presented at Bonaparte’s levee. Instead of the usual question, “Where have you served, Sir?” the First Consul immediately addressed him, “I perceive your name, Sir, is the same as that of the hero of Richardson’s *Romance* !” Here was a Consul. The young

garden-wall ; and still more for his Man of Feeling ; not that it is better, nor so good ; but at the time I read it, I sometimes thought of the heroine, Miss Walton, and of Miss — together, and “ that ligament, fine as it was, was never broken ! ” — One of the poets that I have always read with most pleasure, and can wander about in for ever with a sort of voluptuous indolence, is Spenser ; and I like Chaucer even better. The only writer among the Italians I can pretend to any knowledge of, is Boccaccio, and of him I cannot express half my admiration. His story of the Hawk I could read and think of from day to day, just as I would look at a picture of Titian’s !

I remember, as long ago as the year 1798, going to a neighbouring town (Shrewsbury, where Farquhar has laid the plot of his Recruiting Officer) and bringing home with me, “ at one proud swoop,” a copy of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, and another of Burke’s *Reflexion’s* uncle, who was called *Lovelace*, told me this anecdote while we were stopping together at Calais. I had also been thinking that his was the same name as that of the hero of Richardson’s *Romance*. This is one of my reasons for liking Bonaparte.

tions on the French Revolution—both which I have still; and I still recollect, when I see the covers, the pleasure with which I dipped into them as I returned with my double prize. I was set up for one while. That time is past “with all its giddy raptures:” but I am still anxious to preserve its memory, “embalmed with odours.”—With respect to the first of these works, I would be permitted to remark here in passing, that it is a sufficient answer to the German criticism which has since been started against the character of Satan (*viz.* That it is not one of disgusting deformity, or pure, defecated malice) to say that Milton has there drawn, not the abstract principle of evil, not a devil incarnate, but a fallen angel. This is the scriptural account, and the poet has followed it. We may safely retain such passages as that well-known one—

——“His form had not yet lost  
All her original brightness; nor appear’d  
Less than archangel ruin’d, and the excess  
Of glory obscur’d”—

for the theory, which is opposed to them, “falls flat upon the grunsel edge, and shames its wor-

shippers." Let us hear no more then of this monkish cant, and bigoted outcry for the restoration of the horns and tail of the devil!—Again, as to the other work, Burke's *Reflections*, I took a particular pride and pleasure in it, and read it to myself and others for months afterwards. I had reason for my prejudice in favour of this author. To understand an adversary is some praise : to admire him is more. I thought I did both : I knew I did one. From the first time I ever cast my eyes on any thing of Burke's (which was an extract from his Letter to a Noble Lord in a three-times a week paper, *The St. James's Chronicle*, in 1796), I said to myself, " 'This is true eloquence : this is a man pouring out his mind on paper.' " All other style seemed to me pedantic and impertinent. Dr. Johnson's was walking on stilts ; and even Junius's (who was at that time a favourite with me) with all his terseness, shrunk up into little antithetic points and well-trimmed sentences. But Burke's style was forked and playful as the lightning, crested like the serpent. He delivered plain things on a plain ground ; but when he rose, there was no end

of his flights and circumgyrations—and in this very Letter, “he, like an eagle in a dove-cot, fluttered *his* Volscians” (the Duke of Bedford and the Earl of Lauderdale<sup>1</sup>) “in Corioli.” I did not care for his doctrines. I was then, and am still, proof against their contagion ; but I admired the author, and was considered as not a very staunch partisan of the opposite side, though I thought myself that an abstract proposition was one thing—a masterly transition, a brilliant metaphor, another. I conceived too that he might be wrong in his main argument, and yet deliver fifty truths in arriving at a false conclusion. I remember Coleridge assuring me, as a poetical and political set-off to my sceptical admiration, that Wordsworth had written an Essay on Marriage, which, for manly thought and nervous expression, he deemed incomparably superior. As I had not, at that time, seen any specimens of Mr. Wordsworth’s prose style, I could not venture my doubts on the subject. If there are greater prose-writers than Burke, they

<sup>1</sup> He is there called “Citizen Lauderdale.” Is this the present Earl ?

either lie out of my course of study, or are beyond my sphere of comprehension. I am too old to be a convert to a new mythology of genius. The niches are occupied, the tables are full. If such is still my admiration of this man's misapplied powers, what must it have been at a time when I myself was in vain trying, year after year, to write a single Essay, nay, a single page or sentence; when I regarded the wonders of his pen with the longing eyes of one who was dumb and a changeling; and when, to be able to convey the slightest conception of my meaning to others in words, was the height of an almost hopeless ambition! But I never measured others' excellences by my own defects: though a sense of my own incapacity, and of the steep, impassable ascent from me to them made me regard them with greater awe and fondness. I have thus run through most of my early studies and favourite authors, some of whom I have since criticised more at large. Whether those observations will survive me, I neither know nor do I much care: but to the works themselves, "worthy of all acceptance," and to the

feelings they have always excited in me since I could distinguish a meaning in language, nothing shall ever prevent me from looking back with gratitude and triumph. To have lived in the cultivation of an intimacy with such works, and to have familiarly relished such names, is not to have lived quite in vain.

There are other authors whom I have never read, and yet whom I have frequently had a great desire to read, from some circumstance relating to them. Among these is Lord Clarendon's History of the Grand Rebellion, after which I have a hankering, from hearing it spoken of by good judges—from my interest in the events, and knowledge of the characters from other sources, and from having seen fine portraits of most of them. I like to read a well-penned character, and Clarendon is said to have been a master in this way. I should like to read Froissart's Chronicles, Hollinshed and Stowe, and Fuller's Worthies. I intend, whenever I can, to read Beaumont and Fletcher all through. There are fifty-two of their plays; and I have only read a dozen or fourteen of them. A

Wife for a Month, and Thierry and Theodoret, are, I am told, delicious, and I can believe it. I should like to read the speeches in Thucydides, and Guicciardini's History of Florence, and Don Quixote in the original. I have often thought of reading the Loves of Persiles and Sigismunda, and the Galatea of the same author. But I somehow reserve them like "another Yarrow." I should also like to read the last new novel (if I could be sure it was so) of the Author of Waverley:—no one would be more glad than I to find it the best!



## ESSAY XVIII.

### ON PERSONAL CHARACTER.

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“Men palliate and conceal their original qualities, but do not extirpate them.” MONTAIGNE'S *Essays*.

No one ever changes his character from the time he is two years old ; nay, I might say, from the time he is two hours old. We may, with instruction and opportunity, mend our manners, or else alter them for the worse, “as the flesh and fortune shall serve ;” but the character, the internal, original bias remains always the same, true to itself to the very last—

“And feels the ruling passion strong in death !”

A very grave and dispassionate philosopher (the late celebrated chemist, Mr. Nicholson) was so impressed with the conviction of the

instantaneous commencement and development of the character with the birth, that he published a long and amusing article in the *Monthly Magazine*, giving a detailed account of the progress, history, education, and tempers of two twins, up to the period of their being *eleven days old*. This is, perhaps, considering the matter too curiously, and would amount to a species of horoscopy, if we were to build on such premature indications; but the germ no doubt is there, though we must wait a little longer to see what form it takes. We need not in general wait long. The Devil soon betrays the cloven foot; or a milder and better spirit appears in its stead. A temper sullen or active, shy or bold, grave or lively, selfish or romantic, (to say nothing of quickness or dulness of apprehension) is manifest very early; and imperceptibly, but irresistibly moulds our inclinations, habits, and pursuits through life. The greater or less degree of animal spirits, — of nervous irritability, — the complexion of the blood, — the proportion of “hot, cold, moist, and dry, four champions fierce that strive for mastery,” —

the Saturnine or the Mercurial, — the disposition to be affected by objects near or at a distance, or not at all, — to be struck with novelty, or to brood over deep-rooted impressions, — to indulge in laughter or in tears, the leaven of passion or of prudence that tempers this frail clay, is born with us, and never quits us. “It is not in our stars,” in planetary influence, but neither is it owing “to ourselves, that we are thus or thus.” The accession of knowledge, the pressure of circumstances, favourable or unfavourable, does little more than minister occasion to the first predisposing bias—than assist, like the dews of heaven, or retard, like the nipping north, the growth of the seed originally sown in our constitutions — than give a more or less decided expression to that personal character, the outlines of which nothing can alter. What I mean is, that Blifil and Tom Jones, for instance, by changing places, would never have changed characters. The one might, from circumstances and from the notions instilled into him, have become a little less selfish, and the other a little less extravagant; but with a tri-

ing allowance of this sort, taking the proposition *cum grano salis*, they would have been just where they set out. Blifil would have been Blifil still, and Jones what nature intended him to be. I have made use of this example without any apology for its being a fictitious one, because I think good novels are the most authentic as well as most accessible repositories of the natural history and philosophy of the species.

I shall not borrow assistance or illustration from the organic system of Doctors Gall and Spurzheim, which reduces this question to a small compass and very distinct limits, because I do not understand or believe in it : but I think those who put faith in physiognomy at all, or imagine that the mind is stamped upon the countenance, must believe that there is such a thing as an essential difference of character in different individuals. We do not change our features with our situations ; neither do we change the capacities or inclinations which lurk beneath them. A broad face does not become an oval nor a pug nose a Roman one, with the acquisition

of an office, or the addition of a title. So neither is the pert, hard, unfeeling outline of character turned from selfishness and cunning to openness and generosity, by any softening of circumstances. If the face puts on an habitual smile in the sunshine of fortune, or if it suddenly lowers in the storms of adversity, do not trust too implicitly to appearances; the man is the same at bottom. The designing knave may sometimes wear a vizard, or “to beguile the time, look like the time;” but watch him narrowly, and you will detect him behind his mask! We recognise, after a length of years, the same well-known face that we were formerly acquainted with, changed by time, but the same in itself; and can trace the features of the boy in the full-grown man. Can we doubt that the character and thoughts have remained as much the same all that time; have borne the same image and superscription; have grown with the growth, and strengthened with the strength? In this sense, and in Mr. Wordsworth’s phrase, “the child’s the father of the man” surely enough. The same tendencies may not always be

Equally visible, but they are still in existence, and break out, whenever they dare and can, the more for being checked. Again, we often distinctly notice the same features, the same bodily peculiarities, the same look and gestures in different persons of the same family; and find this resemblance extending to collateral branches and through several generations, shewing how strongly nature must have been warped and biassed in that particular direction at first. This pre-determination in the blood has its caprices too, and wayward as well as obstinate fits. The family-likeness sometimes skips over the next of kin or the nearest branch, and re-appears in all its singularity in a second or third cousin, or passes over the son to the grand-child. Where the pictures of the heirs and successors to a title or estate have been preserved for any length of time in Gothic halls and old-fashioned mansions, the prevailing outline and character does not wear out, but may be traced through its numerous inflections and descents for centuries, like the winding of a river through an expanse of country. The ancestor of many

a noble house has sat for the portraits of his youthful descendants; and still the soul of "Fairfax and the starry Vere," consecrated in Marvel's verse, may be seen mantling in the suffused features of some young court-beauty of the present day. The portrait of Judge Jeffries, which was exhibited lately in the Gallery in Pall Mall—young, handsome, spirited, good-humoured, and totally unlike, at first view, what you would expect from the character, was an exact likeness of two young men whom I knew some years ago, the living representatives of that family. It is curious that, consistently enough with the delineation in the portrait, old Evelyn should have recorded in his Memoirs, that "he saw the Chief-Justice Jeffries in a large company the night before, and that he thought he laughed, drank, and danced too much for a man who had that day condemned Algernon Sidney to the block." It is not always possible to foresee the tiger's spring, till we are in his grasp; the fawning, cruel eye dooms its prey, while it glitters! Features alone do not run in the blood; vices and virtues, genius and folly are

Transmitted through the same sure, but unseen channel. There is an involuntary, unaccountable family-character, as well as family-face ; and we see it manifesting itself in the same way, with unbroken continuity, or by fits and starts. There shall be a regular breed of misers, of incorrigible old *hunkses* in a family, time out of mind ; or the shame of the thing, and the hardships and restraint imposed upon him while young, shall urge some desperate spendthrift to wipe out the reproach upon his name by a course of extravagance and debauchery ; and his immediate successors shall make his example an excuse for relapsing into the old jog-trot incurable infirmity, the grasping and pinching disease of the family again. <sup>1</sup> A person may be indebted for a nose or an

<sup>1</sup> “I know at this time a person of vast estate, who is the immediate descendant of a fine gentleman, but the great-grandson of a broker, in whom his ancestor is now revived. He is a very honest gentleman in his principles, but cannot for his blood talk fairly : he is heartily sorry for it ; but he cheats by constitution, and over-reaches by instinct.”— See this subject delightfully treated in the 75th Number of the Tatler, in an account of Mr. Bickerstaff’s pedigree, on occasion of his sister’s marriage.



eye, for a graceful carriage or a voluble discourse, to a great-aunt or uncle, whose existence he has scarcely heard of; and distant relations are surprised, on some casual introduction, to find each other an *alter idem*. Country cousins, who meet after they are grown up for the first time in London, often start at the likeness,—it is like looking at themselves in the glass—nay, they shall see, almost before they exchange a word, their own thoughts (as it were) staring them in the face, the same ideas, feelings, opinions, passions, prejudices, likings and antipathies; the same turn of mind and sentiment, the same foibles, peculiarities, faults, follies, misfortunes, consolations, the same self, the same every thing! And farther, this coincidence shall take place and be most remarkable, where not only no intercourse has previously been kept up, not even by letter or by common friends, but where the different branches of a family have been estranged for long years, and where the younger part in each have been brought up in totally different situations, with different studies, pursuits, expectations and opportunities.

To assure me that this is owing to circumstances, is to assure me of a gratuitous absurdity, which you cannot know, and which I shall not believe. It is not owing to circumstances, but to the force of kind, to the stuff of which our blood and juices are compounded being the same. Why should I and an old hair-brained uncle of mine fasten upon the same picture in a Collection, and talk of it for years after, though one of no particular “mark or likelihood” in itself, but for something congenial in the look to our own humour and way of seeing nature? Why should my cousin L—— and I fix upon the same book, *Tristram Shandy*, (without comparing notes) have it “doubled down and dog-eared” in the same places, and live upon it as a sort of food that assimilated with our natural dispositions?—“Instinct, Hal, instinct!” They are fools who say otherwise, and have never studied nature or mankind, but in books and systems of philosophy. But, indeed, the colour of our lives is woven into the fatal thread at our births: our original sins and our redeeming graces are infused into us; nor

is, the bond, that confirms our destiny, ever cancelled.

“Beneath the hills, amid the flowery groves,  
The generations are prepar’d ; the pangs,  
The internal pangs, are ready ; the dread strife  
Of poor humanity’s afflicted will  
Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny.”

The “winged wounds” that rankle in our breasts to our latest day, were planted there long since, ticketed and labelled on the outside in small but indelible characters, written in our blood, “like that ensanguined flower inscribed with woe :” we are in the toils from the very first, hemmed in by the hunters; and these are our own passions, bred of our brain and humours, and that never leave us, but consume and gnaw the heart in our short life-time, as worms wait for us in the grave !

Critics and authors, who congregate in large cities, and see nothing of the world but a sort of phantasmagoria, to whom the numberless characters they meet in the course of a few hours are fugitive “as the flies of a summer,” evanescent as the figures in a *ca-*

*mera obscura*, may talk very learnedly, and attribute the motions of the puppets to circumstances of which they are confessedly in total ignorance. They see character only in the bust, and have not room (for the crowd) to study it as a whole-length, that is, as it exists in reality. But those who trace things to their source, and proceed from individuals to generals, know better. School-boys, for example, who are early let into the secret, and see the seeds growing, are not only sound judges, but true prophets of character; so that the nick-names they give their play-fellows usually stick by them ever after. The gossips in country-towns, also, who study human nature, not merely in the history of the individual, but in the genealogy of the race, know the comparative anatomy of the minds of a whole neighbourhood to a tittle, where to look for marks and defects,—explain a vulgarity by a cross in the breed, or a foppish air in a young tradesman by his grandmother's marriage with a dancing-master, and are the only practical conjurors and expert decypherers of the determinate

lines of true or supposititious character.

The character of women (I should think it will at this time of day be granted) differs essentially from that of men, not less so than their shape or the texture of their skin. It has been said indeed, “Most women have no character at all,”—and on the other hand, the fair and eloquent authoress of the *Rights of Women* was for establishing the masculine pretensions and privileges of her sex on a perfect equality with ours. I shall leave Pope and Mary Wolstonecroft to settle that point between them. I should laugh at any one who told me that the European, the Asiatic, and the African character were the same. I no more believe it than I do that black is the same colour as white, or that a straight line is a crooked one. We see in whole nations and large classes the physiognomies, and I should suppose (“not to speak it profanely”) the general characters of different animals with which we are acquainted, as of the fox, the wolf, the hog, the goat, the dog, the monkey; and I suspect this analogy, whether perceived or not, has as prevailing

an influence on their habits and actions, as any theory of moral sentiments taught in the schools. Rules and precautions may, no doubt, be applied to counteract the excesses and overt demonstrations of any such characteristic infirmity; but still the disease will be in the mind, an impediment, not a help to virtue. An exception is usually taken to all national or general reflections, as unjust and illiberal, because they cannot be true of every individual. It is not meant that they are; and besides, the same captious objection is not made to the handsome things that are said of whole bodies and classes of men. A lofty panegyric, a boasted virtue will fit the inhabitants of an entire district to a hair; the want of strict universality, of philosophical and abstract truth is no difficulty here; but if you hint at an obvious vice or defect, this is instantly construed into a most unfair and partial view of the case, and each defaulter throws the imputation from himself and his country with scorn. Thus you may praise the generosity of the English, the prudence of the Scotch, the hospitality of the Irish, as

long as you please, and not a syllable is whispered against these sweeping expressions of admiration; but reverse the picture, hold up to censure, or only glance at the unfavourable side of each character (and they themselves admit that they have a distinguishing and generic character as a people) and you are assailed by the most violent clamours and a confused Babel of noises, as a disseminator of unfounded prejudices, or a libeller of human nature. I am sure there is nothing reasonable in this.—Harsh and disagreeable qualities wear out in nations, as in individuals, from time and intercourse with the world; but it is at the expense of their intrinsic excellences. The vices of softness and effeminacy sink deeper with age, like thorns in the flesh. Single acts or events often determine the fate of mortals, yet may have nothing to do with their general deserts or failings. He who is said to be cured of any glaring infirmity may be suspected never to have had it; and lastly, it may be laid down as a general rule, that mankind improve, by means of luxury and civilization, in social manners, and become

more depraved in what relates to personal habits and character. There are few nations, as well as few men (with the exception of tyrants) that are cruel and voluptuous, immersed in pleasure, and bent on inflicting pain on others, at the same time. Ferociousness is the characteristic of barbarous ages, licentiousness of more refined periods.<sup>1</sup>

I shall not undertake to decide exactly how far the original character may be modified by the general progress of society, or by particular circumstances happening to the individual; but I think the alteration (be it what it may) is more apparent than real, more in conduct than in feeling. I will not deny, that an extreme and violent difference of circumstances (as that between the savage and civilized state) will supersede the common distinctions of character, and prevent certain dispositions and sentiments from ever developing themselves. Yet with reference to

<sup>1</sup> *Fideliter didicisse ingenuas artes  
Emollit mores, nec sinit esse feros.*

The same maxim does not establish the purity of morals that infers their mildness.



this, I would observe, in the first place, that in the most opposite ranks and conditions of life, we find qualities displaying themselves, which we should have least expected,—grace in a cottage, humanity in a bandit, sincerity in courts; and secondly, in ordinary cases, and in the mixed mass of human affairs, the mind contrives to lay hold of those circumstances and motives which suit its own bias and confirm its natural disposition, whatever it may be, gentle or rough, vulgar or refined, spirited or cowardly, open-hearted or cunning. The will is not blindly impelled by outward accidents, but selects the impressions by which it chooses to be governed, with great dexterity and perseverance. Or the machine may be at the disposal of fortune : the man is still his own master. The soul, under the pressure of circumstances, does not lose its original spring ; but, as soon as the pressure is removed, recoils with double violence to its first position. That which any one has been long learning unwillingly, he unlearns with proportionable eagerness and haste. Kings have been said to be incorrigible to

experience. The maxim might be extended, without injury, to the benefit of their subjects; for every man is a king (with all the pride and obstinacy of one) in his own little world. It is only lucky that the rest of the species are not answerable for his caprices! We laugh at the warnings and advice of others; we resent the lessons of adversity, and lose no time in letting it appear that we have escaped from its importunate hold. I do not think, with every assistance from reason and circumstances, that the slothful ever becomes active, the coward brave, the headstrong prudent, the fickle steady, the mean generous, the coarse delicate, the ill-tempered amiable, or the knave honest; but that the restraint of necessity and appearances once taken away, they would relapse into their former and real character again:—*Cucullus non facit monachum*. Manners, situation, example, fashion have a prodigious influence on exterior deportment. But do they penetrate much deeper? The thief will not steal by day; but his having this command over himself does not do away his character or

calling. The priest cannot indulge in certain irregularities; but unless his pulse beats temperately from the first, he will only be playing a part through life. Again, the soldier cannot shrink from his duty in a dastardly manner; but if he has not naturally steady nerves and strong resolution, except in the field of battle, he may be fearful as a woman, though covered with scars and honour. The judge must be disinterested and above suspicion; yet should he have from nature an itching palm, an eye servile and greedy of office, he will somehow contrive to indemnify his private conscience out of his public principle, and husband a reputation for legal integrity, as a stake to play the game of political profligacy with more advantage! There is often a contradiction in character, which is composed of various and unequal parts; and hence there will arise an appearance of fickleness and inconsistency. A man may be sluggish by the father's side, and of a restless and uneasy temper by the mother's; and he may favour either of these inherent dispositions according to circumstances. But he

will not have changed his character, any more than a man who sometimes lives in one apartment of a house and then takes possession of another, according to whim or convenience, changes his habitation. The simply phlegmatic never turns to the truly "fiery quality." So, the really gay or trifling never become thoughtful and serious. The light-hearted wretch takes nothing to heart. He, on whom (from natural carelessness of disposition) "the shot of accident and dart of chance" fall like drops of oil on water, so that he brushes them aside with heedless hand and smiling face, will never be roused from his volatile indifference to meet inevitable calamities. He may try to laugh them off, but will not put himself to any inconvenience to prevent them. I know a man that, if a tiger were to jump into his room, would only play off some joke, some "quip, or crank, or wanton wile" upon him. Mortifications and disappointments may break such a person's heart; but they will be the death of him ere they will make him provident of the future, or willing to forego one idle gratification of the passing moment for

any consideration whatever. The dilatory man never becomes punctual. Resolution is of no avail ; for the very essence of the character consists in this, that the present impression is of more efficacy than any previous resolution. I have heard it said of a celebrated writer, that if he had to get a reprieve from the gallows for himself or a friend (with leave be it spoken), and was to be at a certain place at a given time for this purpose, he would be a quarter of an hour behind-hand. What is to be done in this case? Can you talk or argue a man out of his humour? You might as well attempt to talk or argue him out of a lethargy or a fever. The disease is in the blood : you may see it (if you are a curious observer) meandering in his veins, and reposing on his eye-lids! Some of our foibles are laid in the constitution of our bodies ; others in the structure of our minds, and both are irremediable. The vain man, who is full of himself, is never cured of his vanity, but looks for admiration to the last, with a restless, suppliant eye, in the midst of contumely and contempt ; the modest man

never grows vain from flattery, or unexpected applause, for he sees himself in the diminished scale of other things. He will not “have his nothings monstered.” He knows how much he himself wants, how much others have; and till you can alter this conviction in him, or make him drunk by infusing some new poison, some celestial *ichor* into his veins, you cannot make a cockcomb of him. He is too well aware of the truth of what has been said, that “the wisest amongst us is a fool in some things, as the lowest amongst men has some just notions, and therein is as wise as Socrates; so that every man resembles a statue made to stand against a wall, or in a niche; on one side it is a Plato, an Apollo, a Demosthenes; on the other, it is a rough, unformed piece of stone.”<sup>1</sup> Some persons of my acquaintance, who think themselves *teres et rotundus*, and armed at all points with perfections, would not be much inclined to give in to this sentiment, the modesty of which is only equalled by its sense and ingenuity.

<sup>1</sup> Richardson's Works, On the Science of a Connoisseur, p. 212.

The man of sanguine temperament is seldom weaned from his castles in the air ; nor can you, by virtue of any theory, convert the cold, careful calculator into a wild enthusiast. A self-tormentor is never satisfied, come what will. He always apprehends the worst, and is indefatigable in conjuring up the apparition of danger. He is uneasy at his own good fortune, as it takes from his favourite topic of repining and complaint. Let him succeed to his heart's content in all that is reasonable or important, yet if there is any one thing (and *that* he is sure to find out) in which he does not get on, this embitters all the rest. I know an instance. Perhaps it is myself. Again, a surly man, in spite of warning, neglects his own interest, and will do so, because he has more pleasure in disobliging you than in serving himself. "A friendly man will shew himself friendly," to the last; for those who are said to have been spoiled by prosperity were never really good for any thing. A good-natured man never loses his native happiness of disposition : good temper is an estate for life ; and a man born with

common sense rarely turns out a very egregious fool. It is more common to see a fool become wise, that is, set up for wisdom, and be taken at his word by fools. We frequently judge of a man's intellectual pretensions by the number of books he writes; of his eloquence by the number of speeches he makes; of his capacity for business, by the number of offices he holds. These are not true tests. Many a celebrated author is a known blockhead (between friends); and many a minister of state, whose gravity and self-importance pass with the world for depth of thought and weight of public care, is a laughing-stock to his very servants and dependants.<sup>1</sup> The talents of some men, indeed, which might not otherwise have had a field to display themselves, are called out by extraordinary situations, and rise with the occasion;

<sup>1</sup> The reputation is not the man. Yet all true reputation begins and ends in the opinion of a man's intimate friends. He is what they think him, and in the last result will be thought so by others. Where there is no solid merit to bear the pressure of personal contact, fame is but a vapour raised by accident or prejudice, and will soon vanish like a vapour or a noisome stench. But he who appears to those about



but for all the routine and mechanical preparation, the pomp and parade and big looks of great statesmen, or what is called merely *filling office*, a very shallow capacity, with a certain immoveableness of countenance, is, I should suppose, sufficient, from what I have seen. Such political machines are not so good as the Mock-Duke in the Honey-Moon. As to genius and capacity for the works of art and science, all that a man really excels in, is his own and incommunicable; what he borrows from others he has in an inferior degree, and it is never what his fame rests on. Sir Joshua observes, that Raphael, in his latter pictures, proved that he had learnt in some measure the colouring of Titian. If he had learnt it quite, the merit would still have been Titian's; but he did not learn it, and never would. But his expression (his glory and his excellence) was what he had within himself,

him what he would have the world think him, from whom every one that approaches him in whatever circumstances brings something away to confirm the loud rumour of the popular voice, is alone great in spite of fortune. The malice of friendship, the littleness of curiosity, is as severe a test as the impartiality and enlarged views of history.

first and last; and this it was that seated him on the pinnacle of fame, a pre-eminence that no artist, without an equal warrant from nature and genius, will ever deprive him of. With respect to indications of early genius for particular things, I will just mention, that I myself know an instance of a little boy, who could catch the hardest tunes, when between two and three years old, without any assistance but hearing them played on a hand-organ in the street; and who followed the exquisite pieces of Mozart, played to him for the first time, so as to fall in like an echo at the close. Was this accident, or education, or natural aptitude? I think the last. All the presumptions are for it, and there are none against it.

In fine, do we not see how hard certain early impressions, or prejudices acquired later, are to overcome? Do we not say, habit is a second nature? And shall we not allow the force of nature itself? If the real disposition is concealed for a time and tampered with, how readily it breaks out with the first excuse or opportunity! How soon does the drunkard

forget his resolution and constrained sobriety, at sight of the foaming tankard and blazing hearth! Does not the passion for gaming, in which there had been an involuntary pause, return like a madness all at once? It would be needless to offer instances of so obvious a truth. But if this superinduced nature is not to be got the better of by reason or prudence, who shall pretend to set aside the original one by prescription and management? Thus, if we turn to the characters of women, we find that the shrew, the jilt, the coquette, the wanton, the intriguer, the liar continue all their lives the same. Meet them after the lapse of a quarter or half a century, and they are still infallibly at their old work. No rebuke from experience, no lessons of misfortune make the least impression on them. On they go; and, in fact, they can go on in no other way. They try other things, but it will not do. They are like fish out of water, except in the element of their favourite vices. They might as well not be, as cease to be what they are by nature and custom. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?"

Neither do these wretched persons find any satisfaction or consciousness of their power, but in being a plague and a torment to themselves and every one else as long as they can. A good sort of woman is a character more rare than any of these, but it is equally durable. Look at the head of Hogarth's Idle Apprentice in the boat, holding up his fingers as horns at Cuckold's Point, and ask what penitentiary, what prison-discipline would change the form of his forehead, "villainous low," or the conceptions lurking within it? Nothing:—no mother's fearful warnings,—nor the formidable precautions of that wiser and more loving mother, his country! That fellow is still to be met with somewhere in our time. Is he a spy, a jack-ketch, or an underling of office? In truth, almost all the characters in Hogarth are of the class of incorrigibles; so that I often wonder what has become of some of them. Have the worst of them been cleared out, like the breed of noxious animals? Or have they been swept away, like locusts, in the whirlwind of the French Revolution? Or has Mr. Bentham put them into his Panop-

tiçon ; from which they have come out, so that nobody knows them, like the chimney-sweeper boy at Sadler's Wells, that was thrown into a cauldron and came out a little dapper volunteer? I will not deny that some of them may, like Chaucer's characters, have been modernised a little; but I think I could re-translate a few of them into their mother-tongue, the original honest *black-letter*. We may refine, we may disguise, we may equivocate, we may compound for our vices, without getting rid of them; as we change our liquors, but do not leave off drinking. We may, in this respect, look forward to a decent and moderate, rather than a thorough and radical reform. Or (without going deep into the political question) I conceive we may improve the mechanism, if not the texture of society; that is, we may improve the physical circumstances of individuals and their general relations to the state, though the internal character, like the grain in wood, or the sap in trees, that still rises, bend them how you will, may remain nearly the same. The clay that the potter uses may be of the same quality,

coarse or fine in itself, though he may mould it into vessels of very different shape or beauty. Who shall alter the stamina of national character by any systematic process? Who shall make the French respectable, or the English amiable? Yet the author of *THE YEAR 2500*<sup>1</sup> has done it! Suppose public spirit to become the general principle of action in the community—how would it shew itself? Would it not then become the fashion, like loyalty, and have its apes and parrots, like loyalty? The man of principle would no longer be distinguished from the crowd, the *servum pecus imitatorum*. There is a cant of democracy as well as of aristocracy; and we have seen both triumphant in our day. The Jacobin of 1794 was the Anti-Jacobin of 1814. The loudest chaunters of the Pæans of liberty were the loudest applauders of the restored doctrine of divine right. They drifted with the stream, they sailed before the breeze in either case. The politician was changed; the man was the same, the very same!—But enough of this.

<sup>1</sup> Mercier.

I do not know any moral to be deduced from this view of the subject but one, namely, that we should mind our own business, cultivate our good qualities, if we have any, and irritate ourselves less about the absurdities of other people, which neither we nor they can help. I grant there is something in what I have said, which might be made to glance towards the doctrines of original sin, grace, election, reprobation, or the Gnostic principle that acts alone did not determine the virtue or vice of the character; and in those doctrines, so far as they are deducible from what I have said, I agree—but always with a salvo.

## ESSAY XIX.

### ON VULGARITY AND AFFECTATION.

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FEW subjects are more nearly allied than these two—vulgarity and affectation. It may be said of them truly that “thin partitions do their bounds divide.” There cannot be a surer proof of a low origin or of an innate meanness of disposition, than to be always talking and thinking of being genteel. We must have a strong tendency to that which we are always trying to avoid : whenever we pretend, on all occasions, a mighty contempt for any thing, it is a pretty clear sign that we feel ourselves very nearly on a level with it. Of the two classes of people, I hardly know which is to be regarded with most distaste, the vulgar ~~aping the~~ genteel, or the genteel constantly sneering at and endeavouring to distinguish



themselves from the vulgar. These two sets of persons are always thinking of one another; the lower of the higher with envy, the more fortunate of their less happy neighbours with contempt. They are habitually placed in opposition to each other; jostle in their pretensions at every turn; and the same objects and train of thought (only reversed by the relative situation of either party) occupy their whole time and attention. The one are straining every nerve and outraging common sense, to be thought genteel; the others have no other object or idea in their heads than *not* to be thought vulgar. This is but poor spite; a very pitiful style of ambition. To be merely not that which one heartily despises, is a very humble claim to superiority: to despise what one really is, is still worse. Most of the characters in Miss Burney's novels, the Branghtons, the Smiths, the Dubsters, the Cecilias, the Delvilles, *etc.* are well met in this respect, and much of a piece: the one half are trying not to be taken for themselves, and the other half not to be taken for the first. They neither of them have any pretensions of their

own, or real standard of worth. “A feather will turn the scale of their avoirdupois:” though the fair authoress was not aware of the metaphysical identity of her principal and subordinate characters. Affectation is the master-key to both.

Gentility is only a more select and artificial kind of vulgarity. It cannot exist but by a sort of borrowed distinction. It plumes itself up and revels in the homely pretensions of the mass of mankind. It judges of the worth of every thing by name, fashion, opinion; and hence, from the conscious absence of real qualities or sincere satisfaction in itself, it builds its supercilious and fantastic conceit on the wretchedness and wants of others. Violent antipathies are always suspicious, and betray a secret affinity. The difference between the “Great Vulgar and the Small” is mostly in outward circumstances. The coxcomb criticises the dress of the clown, as the pedant cavils at the bad grammar of the illiterate, or as the prude is shocked at the backslidings of her frail acquaintance. Those who have the fewest resources in themselves, naturally

seek the food of their self-love elsewhere. The most ignorant people find most to laugh at in strangers : scandal and satire prevail most in country-places ; and a propensity to ridicule every the slightest or most palpable deviation from what we happen to approve, ceases with the progress of common sense and decency.<sup>1</sup> True worth does not exult in the faults and deficiencies of others ; as true refinement turns away from grossness and deformity, instead of being tempted to indulge in an unmanly triumph over it. Raphael would not faint away at the daubing of a sign-post, nor Homer hold his head the higher for being

<sup>1</sup> “If an European, when he has cut off his beard and put false hair on his head, or bound up his own natural hair in regular hard knots, as unlike nature as he can possibly make it ; and after having rendered them immoveable by the help of the fat of hogs, has covered the whole with flour, laid on by a machine with the utmost regularity ; if when thus attired he issues forth, and meets a Cherokee Indian, who has bestowed as much time at his toilet, and laid on with equal care and attention his yellow and red oker on particular parts of his forehead or cheeks, as he judges most becoming ; whoever of these two despises the other for this attention to the fashion of his country, which ever first feels himself provoked to laugh, is the barbarian.”—Sir Joshua Reynolds’s Discourses, Vol. I p. 231, 2.

in the company of a Grub-street bard. Real power, real excellence does not seek for a foil in imperfection; nor fear contamination from coming in contact with that which is coarse and homely. It reposes on itself, and is equally free from spleen and affectation. But the spirit of gentility is the mere essence of spleen and affectation,—of affected delight in its own *would-be* qualifications, and of ineffable disdain poured out upon the involuntary blunders or accidental disadvantages of those whom it chooses to treat as its inferiors.—Thus a fashionable Miss titters till she is ready to burst her sides at the uncouth shape of a bonnet, or the abrupt drop of a courtesy (such as Jeanie Deans would make) in a country-girl who comes to be hired by her Mamma as a servant:—yet to shew how little foundation there is for this hysterical expression of her extreme good opinion of herself and contempt for the untutored rustic, she would herself the next day be delighted with the very same-shaped bonnet if brought her by a French milliner and told it was all the fashion, and in a week's time will become quite familiar with

the maid, and chatter with her (upon equal terms) about caps and ribbons and lace by the hour together. There is no difference between them but that of situation in the kitchen or in the parlour : let circumstances bring them together, and they fit like hand and glove. It is like mistress, like maid. Their talk, their thoughts, their dreams, their likings and dislikes are the same. The mistress's head runs continually on dress and finery, so does the maid's : the young lady longs to ride in a coach and six, so does the maid, if she could : Miss forms a *beau ideal* of a lover with black eyes and rosy cheeks, which does not differ from that of her attendant : both like a smart man, the one the footman and the other his master, for the same reason : both like handsome furniture and fine houses : both apply the terms, *shocking*, and *disagreeable*, to the same things and persons : both have a great notion of balls, plays, 'treats, song-books and love-tales : both like a wedding or a christening, and both would give their little fingers to see a coronation, with this difference, that the one has a chance of

getting a seat at it, and the other is dying with envy that she has not.—Indeed, this last is a ceremony that delights equally the greatest monarch and the meanest of his subjects, the vilest of the rabble. Yet this which is the height of gentility and the consummation of external distinction and splendour, is, I should say, a vulgar ceremony. For what degree of refinement, of capacity, of virtue is required in the individual who is so distinguished, or is necessary to his enjoying this idle and imposing parade of his person? Is he delighted with the state-coach and gilded pannels? So is the poorest wretch that gazes at it. Is he struck with the spirit, the beauty and symmetry of the eight cream-coloured horses? There is not one of the immense multitude, who flock to see the sight from town or country, St. Giles's or White-chapel, young or old, rich or poor, gentle or simple, who does not agree to admire the same object. Is he delighted with the yeomen of the guard, the military escort, the groups of ladies, the badges of sovereign power, the king's crown, the marshal's truncheon and the judge's robe, the array that precedes and fol-

lows him, the crowded streets, the windows hung with eager looks? So are the mob, for they "have eyes and see them!" There is no one faculty of mind or body, natural or acquired, essential to the principal figure in this procession, more than is common to the meanest and most despised attendant on it. A wax-work figure would answer the same purpose: a Lord Mayor of London has as much tinsel to be proud of. I would rather have a king do something that no one else has the power or magnanimity to do, or say something that no one else has the wisdom to say, or look more handsome, more thoughtful, or benign than any one else in his dominions. But I see nothing to raise one's idea of him in his being made a show of: if the pageant would do as well without the man, the man would do as well without the pageant! Kings have been declared to be "lovers of low company:" and this maxim, besides the reason sometimes assigned for it, *viz.* that they meet with less opposition to their wills from such persons, will I suspect be found to turn at last on the consideration I am here stating, that

they also meet with more sympathy in their tastes. The most ignorant and thoughtless have the greatest admiration of the baubles, the outward symbols of pomp and power, the sound and show, which are the habitual delight and mighty prerogative of kings. The stupidest slave worships the gaudiest tyrant. The same gross motives appeal to the same gross capacities, flatter the pride of the superior and excite the servility of the dependant. whereas a higher reach of moral and intellectual refinement might seek in vain for higher proofs of internal worth and inherent majesty in the object of its idolatry, and not finding the divinity lodged within, the unreasonable expectation raised would probably end in mortification on both sides!—There is little to distinguish a king from his subjects but the rabble's shout—if he loses that and is reduced to the forlorn hope of gaining the suffrages of the wise and good, he is of all men the most miserable.—But enough of this.

“ I like it,” says Miss Branghton<sup>1</sup> in Eve-

<sup>1</sup> This name was originally spelt Braughton in the Ma-



lina (meaning the Opera) “because it is not vulgar.” That is, she likes it, not because there is any thing to like in it, but because other people are prevented from liking or knowing any thing about it. Janus Weathercock, Esq. laugheth to scorn and despitefully entreateth and hugely condemneth my dramatic articles in the London Magazine, for a like reason. I must therefore make an example of him *in terrorem* to all such hypocritics. He finds fault with me and calls my taste vulgar, because I go to Sadler’s Wells (‘a place he has heard of’—O Lord, Sir!)—because I notice the Miss Dennetts, “great favourites with the Whitechapel orders”—praise Miss Valancy, “a bouncing Columbine at Astley’s and them there places, as his barber informs him” (has he no way of establishing himself in his own good opinion but by triumphing over his barber’s bad English?)—and finally, because I recognise the existence of the Cobourg and the Surrey the-

manuscript, and was altered to Branghton by a mistake of the printer. Branghton, however, was thought a good name for the occasion and was suffered to stand.

àtres, at the names of which he cries “Faugh” with great significance, as if he had some personal disgust at them, and yet he would be supposed never to have entered them. It is not his cue as a well-bred critic. *C’est beau ça.* Now this appears to me a very crude, unmeaning, indiscriminate, wholesale and vulgar way of thinking. It is prejudging things in the lump, by names and places and classes, instead of judging of them by what they are in themselves, by their real qualities and shades of distinction. There is no selection, truth, or delicacy in such a mode of proceeding. It is affecting ignorance, and making it a title to wisdom. It is a vapid assumption of superiority. It is exceeding impertinence. It is rank coxcombry. It is nothing in the world else. To condemn because the multitude admire is as essentially vulgar as to admire because they admire. There is no exercise of taste or judgment in either case : both are equally repugnant to good sense, and of the two I should prefer the good-natured side. I would as soon agree with my barber as differ from him : and why

should I make a point of reversing the sentence of the Whitechapel orders? Or how can it affect my opinion of the merits of an actor at the Cobourg or the Surrey theatres, that these theatres are in or out of the Bills of Mortality? This is an easy, short-hand way of judging, as gross as it is mechanical. It is not a difficult matter to settle questions of taste by consulting the map of London, or to prove your liberality by geographical distinctions. Janus jumbles things together strangely. If he had seen Mr. Kean in a provincial theatre, at Exeter or Taunton, he would have thought it vulgar to admire him: but when he had been stamped in London, Janus would no doubt shew his discernment and the subtlety of his tact for the display of character and passion, by not being behind the fashion. The Miss Dennetts are ‘little unformed gais,’ for no other reason than because they danced at one of the Minor Theatres: let them but come out on the Opera boards, and let the beauty and fashion of the season greet them with a fairy shower of delighted applause, and they would outshine Milanie

“with the foot of fire.” His gorge rises at the mention of a certain quarter of the town: whatever passes current in another, he “swallows total grist unsifted, husks and all.” This is not taste, but folly. At this rate, the hackney-coachman who drives him, or his horse *Contributor* whom he has introduced as a select personage to the vulgar reader, knows as much of the matter as he does.—In a word, the answer to all this in the first instance is to say what vulgarity is. Now its essence, I imagine, consists in taking manners, actions, words, opinions on trust from others, without examining one’s own feelings or weighing the merits of the case. It is coarseness or shallowness of taste arising from want of individual refinement, together with the confidence and presumption inspired by example and numbers. It may be defined to be a prostitution of the mind or body to ape the more or less obvious defects of others, because by so doing we shall secure the suffrages of those we associate with. To affect a gesture, an opinion, a phrase, because it is the rage with a large number of persons, or

to hold it in abhorrence because another set of persons very little, if at all, better informed, cry it down to distinguish themselves from the former, is in either case equal vulgarity and absurdity.—A thing is not vulgar merely because it is common. 'Tis common to breathe, to see, to feel, to live. Nothing is vulgar that is natural, spontaneous, unavoidable. Grossness is not vulgarity, ignorance is not vulgarity, awkwardness is not vulgarity : but all these become vulgar when they are affected and shewn off on the authority of others, or to fall in with *the fashion* or the company we keep. Caliban is coarse enough, but surely he is not vulgar. We might as well spurn the clod under our feet, and call it vulgar. Cobbett is coarse enough, but he is not vulgar. He does not belong to the herd. Nothing real, nothing original can be vulgar : but I should think an imitator of Cobbett a vulgar man. Emery's Yorkshireman is vulgar, because he is a Yorkshireman. It is the cant and gibberish, the cunning and low life of a particular district ; it has "a stamp exclusive and provincial." He might

“gabble most brutishly” and yet not fall under the letter of the definition : but “his speech bewrayeth him,” his dialect (like the jargon of a Bond-street lounge) is the damning circumstance. If he were a mere block-head, it would not signify : but he thinks himself a *knowing hand*, according to the notions and practices of those with whom he was brought up, and which he thinks *the go* everywhere. In a word, this character is not the offspring of untutored nature, but of bad habits ; it is made up of ignorance and conceit. It has a mixture of *slang* in it. All slang phrases are for the same reason vulgar ; but there is nothing vulgar in the common English idiom. Simplicity is not vulgarity ; but the looking to affectation of any sort for distinction is. A cockney is a vulgar character, whose imagination cannot wander beyond the suburbs of the metropolis : so is a fellow who is always thinking of the High-street, Edinburgh. We want a name for this last character. An opinion is vulgar that is stewed in the rank breath of the rabble : nor is it a bit purer or more refined for having

passed through the well-cleansed teeth of a whole court. The inherent vulgarity is in having no other feeling on any subject than the crude, blind, headlong, gregarious notion acquired by sympathy with the mixed multitude or with a fastidious minority, who are just as insensible to the real truth, and as indifferent to every thing but their own frivolous and vexatious pretensions. The upper are not wiser than the lower orders, because they resolve to differ from them. The fashionable have the advantage of the unfashionable in nothing but the fashion. The true vulgar are the *servum pecus imitatorum*—the herd of pretenders to what they do not feel and to what is not natural to them, whether in high or low life. To belong to any class, to move in any rank or sphere of life, is not a very exclusive distinction or test of refinement. Refinement will in all classes be the exception, not the rule; and the exception may fall out in one class as well as another. A king is but an hereditary title. A nobleman is only one of the House of Peers. To be a knight, or alderman is confessedly a vulgar thing.

The king the other day made Sir Walter Scott a baronet, but not all the power of the Three Estates could make another Author of Waverley. Princes, heroes are often common-place people: Hamlet was not a vulgar character, neither was Don Quixote. To be an author, to be a painter, is nothing. It is a trick, it is a trade.

“An author! 'tis a venerable name.

How few deserve it, yet what numbers claim!”

Nay, to be a Member of the Royal Academy, or a Fellow of the Royal Society, is but a vulgar distinction. But to be a Virgil, a Milton, a Raphael, a Claude, is what fell to the lot of humanity but once! I do not think *they* were vulgar people, though for any thing I know to the contrary the first Lord of the Bed-chamber may be a very vulgar man - for any thing I know to the contrary, he may not be so.—Such are pretty much my notions of gentility and vulgarity.

There is a well-dressed and an ill-dressed mob, both which I hate. *Odi profanum vulgus, et arceo*. The vapid affectation of the one is to me even more intolerable than



the gross insolence and brutality of the other. If a set of low-lived fellows are noisy, rude, and boisterous, to shew their disregard of the company, a set of fashionable coxcombs are, to a nauseous degree, finical and effeminate, to shew their thorough breeding. The one are governed by their feelings, however coarse and misguided, which is something; the others consult only appearances, which are nothing, either as a test of happiness or virtue. Hogarth in his prints has trimmed the balance of pretension between the downright blackguard and the *soi-disant* fine gentleman unanswerably. It does not appear in his moral demonstrations (whatever it may do in the genteel letter-writing of Lord Chesterfield, or the chivalrous rhapsodies of Burke) that vice by losing all its grossness loses half its evil. It becomes more contemptible, not less disgusting. What is there in common, for instance, between his beaux and belles, his rakes and his coquets, and the men and women, the true heroic and ideal characters in Raphael? But his people of fashion and quality are just upon a par with the low, the

selfish, the *unideal* characters in the contrasted view of human life, and are often the very same characters, only changing places. If the lower ranks are actuated by envy and uncharitableness towards the upper, the latter have scarcely any feelings but of pride, contempt, and aversion to the lower. If the poor would pull down the rich to get at their good-things, the rich would tread down the poor as in a vine-press, and squeeze the last shilling out of their pockets and the last drop of blood out of their veins. If the head-strong self-will and unruly turbulence of a common ale-house are shocking, what shall we say to the studied insincerity, the insipid want of common sense, the callous insensibility of the drawing-room and *boudoir*? I would rather see the feelings of our common nature (for they are the same at bottom) expressed in the most naked and unqualified way, than see every feeling of our nature suppressed, stifled, hermetically sealed under the smooth, cold, glittering varnish of pretended refinement and conventional politeness. The one may be corrected by being better

informed; the other is incorrigible, wilful, heartless depravity. I cannot describe the contempt and disgust I have felt at the tone of what would be thought good company, when I have witnessed the sleek, smiling, glossy, gratuitous assumption of superiority to every feeling of humanity, honesty or principle, making part of the etiquette, the mental and moral *costume* of the table, and every profession of toleration or favour for the lower orders, that is, for the great mass of our fellow-creatures, treated as an indecorum and breach of the harmony of well-regulated society. In short, I prefer a bear-garden to the adder's den. Or to put the case in its extremest point of view, I have more patience with men in a rude state of nature outraging the human form, than I have with apes "making mops and mows" at the extravagances they have first provoked. I can endure the brutality (as it is termed) of mobs better than the inhumanity of courts. The violence of the one rages like a fire; the insidious policy of the other strikes like a pestilence, and is more fatal and inevitable. The

slow poison of despotism is worse than the convulsive struggles of anarchy. "Of all evils," says Hume, "anarchy is the shortest-lived." The one may "break out like a wild overthrow;" but the other from its secret, sacred stand operates unseen, and undermines the happiness of kingdoms for ages, lurks in the hollow cheek and stares you in the face in the ghastly eye of want and agony and woe. It is dreadful to hear the noise and uproar of an infuriated multitude stung by the sense of wrong, and maddened by sympathy: it is more appalling to think of the smile answered by other gracious smiles, of the whisper echoed by other assenting whispers, which doom them first to despair and then to destruction. Popular fury finds its counterpart in courtly servility. If every outrage is to be apprehended from the one, every iniquity is deliberately sanctioned by the other, without regard to justice or decency. The word of a king, "Go thou and do likewise," makes the stoutest heart dumb: truth and virtue shrink before it.<sup>1</sup> If there are watchwords

<sup>1</sup> A lady of quality, in allusion to the gallantries of a reigning

for the rabble, have not the polite and fashionable their hackneyed phrases, their fulsome unmeaning jargon as well? Both are to me anathema!

To return to the first question, as it regards individual and private manners. There is a fine illustration of the effects of preposterous and affected gentility in the character of Gertrude, in the old comedy of *Eastward Hoe*, written by Ben Jonson, Marston, and Chapman in conjunction. This play is supposed to have given rise to Hogarth's series of prints of the *Idle and Industrious Apprentice*; and there is something exceedingly Hogarthian in the view both of vulgar and of genteel life here displayed. The character of Gertrude in particular, the heroine of the piece, is inimitably drawn. The mixture of vanity and meanness, the internal worthlessness and external pretence, the rustic ignorance and fine lady-like airs, the intoxication of novelty and infatuation of pride, appear like a dream or romance, rather than any

Prince, being told, "I suppose it will be your turn next?" said, "No: I hope not, for you know it is impossible to refuse!"

thing in real life. Cinderella and her glass-slipper are common-place to it. She is not, like Millamant (a century afterwards) the accomplished fine lady, but a pretender to all the foppery and finery of the character. It is the honey-moon with her ladyship, and her folly is at the full. To be a wife and the wife of a knight are to her pleasures “worn in their newest gloss,” and nothing can exceed her raptures in the contemplation of both parts of the dilemma. It is not familiarity, but novelty that weds her to the court. She rises into the air of gentility from the ranksoil of a city-life, and flutters about there with all the fantastic delight of a butterfly that has just changed its caterpillar state. The sound of My Lady intoxicates her with delight, makes her giddy, and almost turns her brain. On the bare strength of it she is ready to turn her father and mother out of doors, and treats her brother and sister with infinite disdain and judicial hardness of heart. With some speculators, the modern philosophy has deadened and distorted all the natural affections : and before abstract

ideas and the mischievous refinements of literature were introduced, nothing was to be met with in the primeval state of society but simplicity and pastoral innocence of manners—

“And all was conscience and tender heart.”

This historical play gives the lie to the above theory pretty broadly, yet delicately. Our heroine is as vain as she is ignorant, and as unprincipled as she is both; and without an idea or wish of any kind but that of adorning her person in the glass, and being called and thought a lady, something superior to a citizen's wife. <sup>1</sup> She is so bent on finery that

<sup>1</sup> “*Girtred.* For the passion of patience, look if Sir Petronel approach. That sweet, that fine, that delicate, that—for love's sake, tell me if he come. Oh, sister Mill, though my father be a low-capt tradesman, yet I must be a lady, and I praise God my mother must call me Madam. Does he come? Off with this gown for shame's sake, off with this gown! Let not my knight take me in the city cut, in any hand! Tear't! Pox on't (does he come?) tear't off! *Thus while she sleeps, I sorrow for her sake.* (Sings.)

*Mildred.* Lord, sister, with what an immodest impatience and disgraceful scorn do you put off your city-tire! I am sorry to think you imagine to right yourself in wronging that which hath made both you and us.

she believes in miracles to obtain it, and expects the fairies to bring it her. She is

*Gir.* I tell you, I cannot endure it : I must be a lady : do you wear your quoff with a London licket ! your stamel petticoat with two guards ! the buslin gown with the tufftuff cap and the velvet lace ! I must be a lady ; and I will be a lady. I like some humours of the city dames well : to eat cherries only at an angel a pound ; good : to dye rich scarlet black ; pretty : to line a grogram gown clean through with velvet ; tolerable : their pure linen, their smocks of three pound a smock, are to be borne withal : but your mincing niceries, tufftuff pipkins, durance petticoats, and silver bodkins—God's my life ! as I shall be a lady, I cannot endure it.

*Mil.* Well, sister, those that scorn their nest, oft fly with a sick wing.

*Gir.* Bow-hell ! Alas, poor Mill, when I am a lady, I'll pray for thee yet i'faith ; nay, and I'll vouchsafe to call thee sister Mill still ; for though thou art not like to be a lady as I am, yet surely thou art a creature of God's making, and may'st peradventure be saved as soon as I (does he come ?) *And ever and anon she doubled in her song.*

*Mil.* Now (lady's my comfort) what a profane ape's here !

*Enter Sir PETRONEL FLASH, Mr. TOUCHSTONE, and Mrs. TOUCHSTONE.*

*Gir.* Is my knight come ? O the lord, my band ! Sister, do my cheeks look well ? Give me a little box o'the ear, that I may seem to blush. Now, now ! so, there, there ! here he is ! O my dearest delight ! Lord, lord ! and how does my knight ?



quite above thinking of a settlement, jointure, or pin-money. She takes the will for

*Touchstone.* Fic, with more modesty.

*Gir.* Modesty! why, I am no citizen now. Modesty! am I not to be married? You're best to keep me modest, now I am to be a lady.

*Sir Petronel.* Boldness is a good fashion, and court-like.

*Gir.* Aye, in a country lady I hope it is, as I shall be. And how chance ye came no sooner, knight?

*Sir Pet.* Faith, I was so entertained in the progress with one Count Epernoun, a Welch knight: we had a match at baloon too with my Lord Whackum for four crowns.

*Gir.* And when shall 's be married, my knight?

*Sir Pet.* I am come now to consummate: and your father may call a poor knight son-in-law.

*Mrs. Touchstone.* Yes, that he is a knight: I know where he had money to pay the gentlemen ushers and heralds their fees. Aye, that he is a knight: and so might you have been too, if you had been aught else but an ass, as well as some of your neighbours. An I thought you would not ha' been knighted, as I am an honest woman, I would ha' dubbed you myself. I praise God, I have wherewithal. But as for you, daughter—

*Gir.* Aye, mother, I must be a lady to-morrow; and by your leave, mother (I speak it not without my duty, but only in the right of my husband), I must take place of you, mother.

*Mrs. Touch.* That you shall, lady-daughter; and ha coach as well as I.

*Gir.* Yes, mother; but my coach-horses must take the wail of your coach-horses.

the deed all through the piece, and is so besotted with this ignorant, vulgar notion of

*Touch.* Come, come, the day grows low ; 'tis supper-time · and sir, respect my daughter ; she has refused for you wealthy and honest matches, known good men.

*Gir.* Body o' truth, citizens, citizens ! Sweet knight, as soon as ever we are married, take me to thy mercy, out of this miserable city. Presently : carry me out of the scent of Newcastle coal and the hearing of Bow-bell, I beseech thee ; down with me, for God's sake." ACT I. SCENE I.

This dotage on sound and show seemed characteristic of that age (see *New Way to Pay Old Debts*, etc.)—as if in the grossness of sense, and the absence of all intellectual and abstract topics of thought and discourse (the thin, circulating medium of the present day) the mind was attracted without the power of resistance to the tinkling sound of its own name with a title added to it, and the image of its own person tricked out in old-fashioned finery. The effect, no doubt, was also more marked and striking from the contrast between the ordinary penury and poverty of the age and the first and more extravagant demonstrations of luxury and artificial refinement. Here is one more of specimen.

"*Girtred.* Good lord, that there are no faivies now-a-days, Syn.

*Syndefy.* Why, Madam ?

*G'r.* To do miracles, and bring ladies money. Sure, if we lay in a cleanly house, they would haunt it, Synne ? I'll wy. I'll sweep the chamber soon at night, and set a dish of water o' the hearth. A fairy may come and bring a pearl or a diamond. We do not know, Synne : or there may be a pot of gold hid in the yard, if we had tools to dig for 't.

rank and title as a real thing that cannot be counterfeited, that she is the dupe of her own fine stratagems, and marries a gull, a dolt, a broken adventurer for an accomplished and brave gentleman. Her meanness is equal to her folly or her pride (and nothing can be greater), yet she holds out on the strength of her original pretensions for a long time, and plays the upstart with decent and imposing consistency. Indeed her infatuation and caprices are akin to the flighty perversity of a disordered imagination; and another turn of the wheel of good or evil fortune would have

Why may not we two rise early i' the morning, Synne, afore any body is up, and find a jewel i' the streets worth a hundred pounds? May not some great court-lady, as she comes from revels at midnight, look out of her coach, as 'tis running, and lose such a jewel, and we find it? ha!

*Syn.* They are pretty waking dreams, these.

*Gir.* Or may not some old usurer be drunk over-night with a bag of money, and leave it behind him on a stall? For God's sake, Syn, let 's rise to-morrow by break of day, and see. I protest, la, if I had as much money as an alderman, I would scatter some on't i' the streets, for poor ladies to find when their knights were laid up. And now I remember my song of the Golden Shower, why may not I have such fortune? I'll sing it, and try what luck I shall have after it.

ACT V. SCENE I.

sent her to keep company with Hogarth's *Merveilleuses* in Bedlam, or with Deckar's group of Coquets in the same place.—The other parts of the play are a dreary lee-shore, like Cuckold's Point on the coast of Essex, where the preconcerted ship-wreck takes place that winds up the catastrophe of the piece. But this is also characteristic of the age, and serves as a contrast to the airy and factitious character which is the principal figure in the plot. We had made but little progress from that point till Hogarth's time, if Hogarth is to be believed in his description of city-manners. How wonderfully we have distanced it since!

Without going into this at length, there is one circumstance I would mention in which I think there has been a striking improvement in the family economy of modern times—and that is, in the relation of mistresses and servants. After visits and finery, a married woman of the old school had nothing to do but to attend to her housewifery. She had no other resource, no other sense of power, but to harangue and lord it over her domestics.

Modern book-education supplies the place of the old-fashioned system of kitchen persecution and eloquence. A well-bred woman now seldom goes into the kitchen to look after the servants :—formerly what was called a good manager, an exemplary mistress of a family, did nothing but hunt them from morning to night, from one year's end to another, without leaving them a moment's rest, peace, or comfort. Now a servant is left to do her work without this suspicious and tormenting interference and fault-finding at every step, and she does it all the better. The proverbs about the mistress's eye, *etc.* are no longer held for current. A woman from this habit, which at last became an unconquerable passion, would scold her maids for fifty years together, and nothing could stop her : now the temptation to read the last new poem or novel, and the necessity of talking of it in the next company she goes into, prevent her—and the benefit to all parties is incalculable !

## ESSAY XX.

### ON ANTIQUITY.

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THERE is no such thing as Antiquity in the ordinary acceptation we affix to the term. Whatever is or has been, while it is passing, must be modern. The early ages may have been barbarous in themselves; but they have become *ancient* with the slow and silent lapse of successive generations. The “olden times” are only such in reference to us. The past is rendered strange, mysterious, visionary, awful, from the great gap in time that parts us from it, and the long perspective of waning years. Things gone by and almost forgotten, look dim and dull, uncouth and quaint, from our ignorance of them, and the mutability of customs. But in their day they were fresh, unimpaired, in full vigour, familiar, and

*glossy.* The *Children in the Wood*, and *Percy's Relics*, were once recent productions ; and Auld Robin Gray was, in his time, a very common-place old fellow ! The wars of York and Lancaster, while they lasted, were "lively, audible, and full of vent," as fresh and lusty as the white and red roses that distinguished their different banners, though they have since become a by-word and a solecism in history.

The sun shone in Julius Cæsar's time just as it does now. On the road-side between Winchester and Salisbury are some remains of old Roman encampments, with their double lines of circumvallation (now turned into pasturage for sheep) which answer exactly to the descriptions of this kind in Cæsar's *Commentaries*. In a dull and cloudy atmosphere, I can conceive that this is the identical spot that the first Cæsar trod ; and figure to myself the deliberate movements and scarce perceptible march of close-embodied legions. But if the sun breaks out, making its way through dazzling, fleecy clouds, lights up the blue serene, and gilds the sombre earth, I can no

longer persuade myself that it is the same scene as formerly, or transfer the actual image before me so far back. The brightness of nature is not easily reduced to the low, twilight tone of history; and the impressions of sense defeat and dissipate the faint traces of learning and tradition. It is only by an effort of reason, to which fancy is averse, that I bring myself to believe that the sun shone as bright, that the sky was as blue, and the earth as green, two thousand years ago as it is at present. How ridiculous this seems; yet so it is!

The *dark* or middle ages, when every thing was hid in the fog and haze of confusion and ignorance, seem, to the same involuntary kind of prejudice, older and farther off, and more inaccessible to the imagination, than the brilliant and well-defined periods of Greece and Rome. A Gothic ruin appears buried in a greater depth of obscurity, to be weighed down and rendered venerable with the hoar of more distant ages, to have been longer mouldering into neglect and oblivion, to be a record and memento of events more wild and



alien to our own times, than a Grecian temple.<sup>1</sup> Amadis de Gaul, and the Seven Champions of Christendom, with me (honestly speaking) rank as contemporaries with Theseus, Piri-thous, and the heroes of the fabulous ages. My imagination will stretch no farther back into the commencement of time than the first traces and rude dawn of civilization and mighty enterprise in either case; and in attempting to force it upwards by the scale of chronology, it only recoils upon itself, and dwindles from a lofty survey of “the dark rearward and abyss of time,” into a poor and puny calculation of insignificant cyphers. In like manner, I cannot go back to any time more remote and dreary than that recorded in Stow’s and Holingshed’s Chronicles, unless

<sup>1</sup> “The Gothic architecture, though not so ancient as the Grecian, is more so to our imagination, with which the artist is more concerned than with absolute truth.”—*Sir Joshua Reynolds’s Discourses*, vol. ii. p. 138.

Till I met with this remark in so circumspect and guarded a writer as Si. Joshua, I was afraid of being charged with extravagance in some of the above assertions. *Pereant isti qui ante nos nostra dixerunt.* It is thus that our favourite speculations are often accounted paradoxes by the ignorant, while by the learned reader they are set down as plagiarisms.

I turn to "the wars of old Assaracus and Inachus divine," and the gorgeous events of Eastern history, where the distance of place may be said to add to the length of time and weight of thought. That is old (in sentiment and poetry) which is decayed, shadowy, imperfect, out of date, and changed from what it was. That of which we have a distinct idea, which comes before us entire and made out in all its parts, will have a novel appearance, however old in reality; nor can it be impressed with the romantic and superstitious character of antiquity. Those times that we can parallel with our own in civilization and knowledge, seem advanced into the same line with our own in the order of progression. The perfection of art does not look like the infancy of things. Or those times are prominent, and, as it were, confront the present age, that are raised high in the scale of polished society, and the trophies of which stand out above the low, obscure, grovelling level of barbarism and rusticity. Thus, Rome and Athens were two cities set on a hill, that could not be hid, and that every where meet the

retrospective eye of history. It is not the full-grown, articulated, thoroughly accomplished periods of the world, that we regard with the pity or reverence due to age; so much as those imperfect, unformed, uncertain periods, which seem to totter on the verge of non-existence, to shrink from the grasp of our feeble imaginations, as they crawl out of, or retire into the womb of time, and of which our utmost assurance is to doubt whether they ever were or not!

To give some other instances of this feeling, taken at random. Whittington and his Cat, the first and favourite studies of my child-hood, are, to my way of thinking, as old and reverend personages as any recorded in more authentic history. It must have been long before the invention of triple bob-majors, that Bow-bells rang out their welcome never-to-be-forgotten peal, hailing him Thrice Lord Mayor of London. Does not all we know relating to the site of old London-wall and the first stones that were laid of this mighty metropolis seem of a far older date (hid in the lap of "chaos and old night") than the splendid and impo-

sing details of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire?—Again, the early Italian pictures of Cimabue, Giotto, and Ghirlandaio are covered with the marks of unquestionable antiquity; while the Greek statues, done a thousand years before them, shine in glossy, undiminished splendour, and flourish in immortal youth and beauty. The latter Grecian Gods, as we find them there represented, are to all appearance a race of modern fine gentlemen, who *led the life of honour* with their favourite mistresses of mortal or immortal mould—were gallant, graceful, well-dressed, and well-spoken; whereas the Gothic deities, long after carved in horrid wood or misshapen stone, and worshipped in dreary waste or tangled forest, belong, in the mind's heraldry, to almost as ancient a date as those elder and discarded Gods of the Pagan mythology, Ops, and Rhea and old Saturn—those strange anomalies of earth and cloudy spirit, born of the elements and conscious will, and clothing themselves and all things with shape and formal being. The Chronicle of Brute, in Spenser's Fairy Queen, has a tolerable air

of antiquity in it ; so in the dramatic line, the Ghost of one of the old kings of Ormus, introduced as Prologue to Fulke Greville's play of *Mustapha*, is reasonably far-fetched, and palpably obscure. A monk in the *Popish Calendar*, or even in the *Canterbury Tales*, is a more questionable and out-of-the-way personage than the Chiron of Achilles, or the high-priest in Homer. When Chaucer, in his *Troilus and Cressida*, makes the Trojan hero invoke the absence of light, in these two lines—

“ Why proffer'st thou light me for to sell?  
Go sell it them that smalle selès grave !”

he is guilty of an anachronism ; or at least I much doubt whether there was such a profession as that of seal-engraver in the Trojan war. But the dimness of the objects and the quaintness of the allusion throw us farther back into the night of time, than the golden, glittering images of the *Iliad*. The *Travels of Anacharsis* are less obsolete at this time of day than *Coryate's Crudities*, or *Fuller's Worthies*. “ Here is some of the ancient city,” said a Roman, taking up a handful of dust from

beneath his feet. The ground we tread on is as old as the creation, though it does not seem so, except when collected into gigantic masses, or separated by gloomy solitudes from modern uses and the purposes of common life. The lone Helvellyn and the silent Andes are in thought coeval with the globe itself, and can only perish with it. The Pyramids of Egypt are vast, sublime, old, eternal; but Stonehenge, built no doubt in a later day, satisfies my capacity for the sense of antiquity; it seems as if as much rain had drizzled on its grey, withered head, and it had watched out as many winter-nights; the hand of time is upon it, and it has sustained the burden of years upon its back, a wonder and a ponderous riddle, time out of mind, without known origin or use, baffling fable or conjecture, the credulity of the ignorant, or wise men's search.

“Thou noblest monument of Albion's isle,  
Whether by Merlin's aid, from Scythia's shore  
To Amber's fatal plain Pendragon bore,  
Huge frame of giant hands, the mighty pile,  
T'entomb his Britons slain by Hengist's guile:  
Or Draid priests, sprinkled with human gore,

• Taught mid thy massy maze their mystic lore  
Or Danish chiefs, enrich'd with savage spoil,  
To victory's idol vast, an unhewn shrine,  
Rear'd the rude heap, or in thy hallow'd round  
Repose the kings of Brutus' genuine line ;  
Or here those kings in solemn state were crown'd ;  
Studious to trace thy wondrous origin,  
We muse on many an ancient tale renown'd."

WARTON.

So it is with respect to ourselves also. It is the sense of change or decay that marks the difference between the real and apparent progress of time, both in the events of our own lives and the history of the world we live in.

Impressions of a peculiar and accidental nature, of which few traces are left, and which return seldom or never, fade in the distance, and are consigned to obscurity ; while those that belong to a given and definite class are kept up, and assume a constant and tangible form from familiarity and habit. That which was personal to myself merely, is lost and confounded with other things, like a drop in the ocean ; it was but a point at first, which by its nearness affected me, and by its removal becomes nothing ; while circumstances of a general interest and abstract importance present

the same distinct, well-known aspect as ever, and are durable in proportion to the extent of their influence. Our own idle feelings and foolish fancies we get tired or grow ashamed of, as their novelty wears out; "when we become men, we put away childish things;" but the impressions we derive from the exercise of our higher faculties last as long as the faculties themselves. They have nothing to do with time, place, and circumstance; and are of universal applicability and recurrence. An incident in my own history, that delighted or tormented me very much at the time, I may have long since blotted from my memory, or have great difficulty in calling to mind after a certain period; but I can never forget the first time of my seeing Mrs. Siddons act, which appears as if it happened yesterday; and the reason is because it has been something for me to think of ever since. The petty and the personal, that which appeals to our senses and our appetites, passes away with the occasion that gives it birth. The grand and the ideal, that which appeals to the imagination, can only perish with it, and remains with us, unim-



paired in its lofty abstraction, from youth to age; as wherever we go, we still see the same heavenly bodies shining over our heads! An old familiar face, the house that we were brought up in, sometimes the scenes and places that we formerly knew and loved, may be changed, so that we hardly know them again; the characters in books, the faces in old pictures, the propositions in Euclid remain the same as when they were first pointed out to us. There is a continual alternation of generation and decay in individual forms and feelings, that marks the progress of existence, and the ceaseless current of our lives, borne along with it; but this does not extend to our love of art or knowledge of nature. It seems a long time ago since some of the first events of the French Revolution; the prominent characters that figured then have been swept away and succeeded by others; yet I cannot say that this circumstance has in any way abated my hatred of tyranny, or reconciled my understanding to the fashionable doctrine of Divine Right. The sight of an old newspaper of that date would give one a fit of the spleen

for half an hour; on the other hand, it must be confessed, Mr. Burke's Reflections on this subject are as fresh and dazzling as in the year 1791; and his Letter to a Noble Lord is even now as interesting as Lord John Russell's Letter to Mr. Wilberforce, which appeared only a few weeks back. Ephemeral politics and still-born productions are speedily consigned to oblivion; great principles and original works are a match even for time itself!

We may, by following up this train of ideas, give some account why time runs faster as our years increase. We gain by habit and experience a more determinate and settled, that is, a more uniform notion of things. We refer each particular to a given standard. Our impressions acquire the character of identical propositions. Our most striking thoughts are turned into truisms. One observation is like another, that I made formerly. The idea I have of a certain character or subject is just the same as I had ten years ago. I have learnt nothing since. There is no alteration perceptible, no advance made; so that the two points of time seem to touch and coincide. I get

from the one to the other immediately by the familiarity of habit, by the undistinguishing process of abstraction. What I can recall so easily and mechanically does not seem far off; it is completely within my reach, and consequently close to me in apprehension. I have no intricate web of curious speculation to wind or unwind, to pass from one state of feeling and opinion to the other; no complicated train of associations, which place an immeasurable barrier between my knowledge or my ignorance at different epochs. There is no contrast, no repugnance to widen the interval; no new sentiment infused, like another atmosphere, to lengthen the perspective. I am but where I was. I see the object before me just as I have been accustomed to do. The ideas are written down in the brain as in the page of a book—*totidem verbis et literis*. The mind becomes *stereotyped*. By not going forward to explore new regions, or break up new grounds, we are thrown back more and more upon our past acquisitions; and this habitual recurrence increases the facility and indifference with which we make the imagi-

nary transition. By thinking of what has been, we change places with ourselves, and transpose our personal identity at will; so as to fix the slider of our improgressive continuance; at whatever point we please. This is an advantage or a disadvantage, which we have not in youth. After a certain period, we neither lose nor gain, neither add to, nor diminish our stock; up to that period we do nothing else but lose our former notions and being, and gain a new one every instant. Our life is then like the birth of a new day; the dawn breaks apace, and the clouds clear away. A new world of thought and observation is opened to our search. A year makes the difference of an age. A total alteration takes place in our ideas, feelings, habits, looks. We outgrow ourselves. A separate set of objects, of the existence of which we had not a suspicion, engages and occupies our whole souls. Shapes and colours of all varieties, and of gorgeous tint, intercept our view of what we were. Life thickens. Time glows on its axle. Every revolution of the wheel gives an unsettled aspect to things. The world and

its inhabitants turn round, and we forget one change of scene in another. Art woos us; science tempts us into her intricate labyrinths; each step presents unlooked-for vistas, and closes upon us our backward path. Our onward road is strange, obscure, and infinite. We are bewildered in a shadow, lost in a dream. Our perceptions have the brightness and the indistinctness of a trance. Our continuity of consciousness is broken, crumbles, and falls in pieces. We go on, learning and forgetting every hour. Our feelings are chaotic, confused, strange to each other and to ourselves. Our life does not hang together, but straggling, disjointed, winds its slow length along, stretching out to the endless future—unmindful of the ignorant past. We seem many beings in one, and cast the slough of our existence daily. The birth of knowledge is the generation of time. The unfolding of our experience is long and voluminous; nor do we all at once recover from our surprise at the number of objects that distract our attention. Every new study is a separate, arduous, and insurmountable undertaking. We are lost

in wonder at the magnitude, the difficulty, and the interminable prospect. We spell out the first years of our existence, like learning a lesson for the first time, where every advance is slow, doubtful, interesting: afterwards we rehearse our parts by rote, and are hardly conscious of the meaning. A very short period (from fifteen to twenty-five or thirty) includes the whole map and table of contents of human life. From that time we may be said to live our lives over again, to repeat ourselves—the same thoughts return at stated intervals, like the tunes of a barrel-organ; and the volume of the universe is no more than a form of words and book of reference.

Time in general is supposed to move faster or slower, as we attend more or less to the succession of our ideas, in the same manner as distance is increased or lessened by the greater or less variety of intervening objects. There is, however, a difference in this respect. Suspense, where the mind is engrossed with one idea, and kept from amusing itself with any other, is not only the most uncomfortable, but the most tiresome of all things.

The fixing our attention on a single point makes us more sensible of the delay, and hangs an additional weight of fretful impatience on every moment of expectation. People in country places, without employment or artificial resources, complain that time lies heavy on their hands. Its leaden pace is not occasioned by the quantity of thought, but by vacancy, and the continual, languid craving after excitement. It wants spirit and vivacity to give it motion. We are on the watch to see how time goes ; and it appears to lag behind, because, in the absence of objects to arrest our immediate attention, we are always getting on before it. We do not see its divisions, but we feel the galling pressure of each creeping sand that measures out our hours. Again, a rapid succession of external objects and amusements, which leave no room for reflection, and where one gratification is forgotten in the next, makes time pass quickly, as well as delightfully. We do not perceive an extent of surface, but only a succession of points. We are whirled swiftly along by the hand of dissipation, but

cannot stay to look behind us. On the contrary, change of scene, travelling through a foreign country, or the meeting with a variety of striking adventures that lay hold of the imagination, and continue to haunt it in a waking dream, will make days seem weeks. From the crowd of events, the number of distinct points of view, brought into a small compass, we seem to have passed through a great length of time, when it is no such thing. In traversing a flat, barren country, the monotony of our ideas fatigues, and makes the way longer; whereas, if the prospect is diversified and picturesque, we get over the miles without counting them. In painting or writing, hours are melted almost into minutes : the mind, absorbed in the eagerness of its pursuit, forgets the time necessary to accomplish it ; and, indeed, the clock often finds us employed on the same thought or part of a picture that occupied us when it struck last. It seems then there are several other circumstances, besides the number and distinctness of our ideas, to be taken into the account in the measure of time, or in consi-



dering "whom time ambles withal, whom time gallops withal, and whom he stands still withal." Time wears away slowly with a man in solitary confinement; not from the number or variety of his ideas, but from their weary sameness, fretting like drops of water. The imagination may distinguish the lapse of

' "*Rosalind.* Time travels in divers paces with divers persons: I'll tell you who time ambles withal, who time trots withal, who time gallops withal, and who he stands still withal.

*Orlando.* I prythee, who doth he trot withal?

*Ros.* Marry, he trots hard with a young maid between the contract of her marriage and the day it is solemnized: if the interim be but a se'nnight, time's pace is so hard that it seems the length of seven years.

*Orl.* Who ambles time withal?

*Ros.* With a priest that lacks Latin, and a rich man that hath not the gout; for the one sleeps easily, because he cannot study; and the other lives merrily, because he feels no pain; the one lacking the burden of lean and wasteful learning; the other knowing no burden of heavy tedious penury. These time ambles with.

*Orl.* Who doth he gallop withal?

*Ros.* With a thief to the gallows; for though he go as softly as foot can fall, he thinks himself too soon there.

*Orl.* Who stays it withal?

*Ros.* With lawyers in the vacation; for they sleep between term and term, and then they perceive not how time moves."

—*As You Like It*, ACT III. SCENE II.

time by the brilliant variety of its tints, and the many striking shapes it assumes; the heart feels it by the weight of sadness, and “grim-visaged, comfortless despair!”

’ I will conclude this subject with remarking, that the fancied shortness of life is aided by the apprehension of a future state. The constantly directing our hopes and fears to a higher state of being beyond the present, necessarily brings death habitually before us, and defines the narrow limits within which we hold our frail existence, as mountains bound the horizon, and unavoidably draw our attention to it. This may be one reason among others why the fear of death was a less prominent feature in ancient times than it is at present: because the thoughts of it, and of a future state, were less frequently impressed on the mind by religion and morality. The greater progress of civilization and security in modern times has also considerably to do with our practical effeminacy; for though the old Pagans were not bound to think of death as a religious duty, they never could foresee when they should be compelled

to submit to it, as a natural necessity, or accident of war, *etc.* They viewed death, therefore, with an eye of speculative indifference and practical resolution. That the idea of annihilation did not impress them with the same horror and repugnance as it does the modern believer, or even infidel, is easily accounted for (though a writer in the *Edinburgh Review* thinks the question insoluble<sup>1</sup>) from this plain reason, *viz.* that not

<sup>1</sup> “On the other point, namely, the dark and sceptical spirit prevalent through the works of this poet (Lord Byron) we shall not now utter all that we feel, but rather direct the notice of our readers to it as a singular phenomenon in the poetry of the age. Whoever has studied the spirit of Greek and Roman literature, must have been struck with the comparative disregard and indifference, wherewith the thinking men of these exquisitely polished nations contemplated those subjects of darkness and mystery which afford at some period or other of his life, so much disquiet—we had almost said so much agony, to the mind of every reflecting modern. It is difficult to account for this in any very satisfactory, and we suspect altogether impossible to do so in any strictly logical, manner. In reading the works of Plato and his interpreter Cicero, we find the germs of all the doubts and anxieties to which we have alluded, so far as these are connected with the workings of our reason. The singularity is, that those clouds of darkness, which hang over the intellect, do not appear, so far as we can per-

being taught from childhood a belief in a future state of existence as a part of the creed of their country, the having this belief called into question or struck from under their feet did not cause the same uneasiness or confusion of mind in them as it does in us. He who

ceive, to have thrown at any time any very alarming shade upon the feelings or temper of the ancient sceptic. We should think a very great deal of this was owing to the brilliancy and activity of his southern fancy. The lighter spirits of antiquity, like the more mercenary of our moderns, sought refuge in mere *gaieté du cœur* and diversion. The graver poets and philosophers—and poetry and philosophy were in those days seldom disunited—built up some airy and beautiful system of mysticism, each following his own devices, and suiting the erection to his own peculiarities of hope and inclination; and this being once accomplished, the mind appears to have felt quite satisfied with what it had done, and to have reposed amidst the splendours of its sand-built fantastic edifice, with as much security as if it had been grooved and rivetted into the rock of ages. The mere exercise of ingenuity in devising a system furnished consolation to its creators, or improvers. Lucretius is a striking example of all this; and it may be averred that down to the time of Claudian, who lived in the fourth century of our æra, in no classical writer of antiquity do there occur any traces of what moderns understand by the restlessness and discomfort of uncertainty, as to the government of the world and the future destinies of man.”—*Edinburgh Review*, vol. xxx. p. 96, 97. *Article, Childe Harold*, Canto 4.

has never been led to expect the reversion of an estate, does not severely feel the loss of it : for it is the indulgence of hope that embitters disappointment.

## ESSAY XXI.

### ON THE REGAL CHARACTER.

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THIS is a subject exceedingly curious, and worth explaining. In writing a criticism, I hope I shall not be accused of intending a libel. Kings are remarkable for long memories in the merest trifles. They never forget a face or person they have once seen, nor an anecdote they have been told of any one they know. Whatever differences of character or understanding they manifest in other respects, they all possess what Dr. Spurzheim would call the *organ of individuality*, or the power of recollecting particular local circumstances, nearly in the same degree ; though I shall attempt to account for it without recurring to his system. This kind of personal memory is the natural effect of that self-importance which makes them attach a correspondent significance to

all that comes in contact with themselves. Nothing can be a matter of indifference to a King, that happens to a King. That intense consciousness of their lofty identity, which never quits them, extends to whatever falls under their immediate cognisance. It is the glare of Majesty reflected from their own persons on the persons of those about them, that fixes their attention; and it is the same false lustre that makes them blind and insensible to all that lies beyond that narrow sphere. “My Lord,” said an English King to one of his courtiers, “I have seen you in that coat before with different buttons”—to the astonishment of the Noble Peer. There was nothing wonderful in it. It was the habitual jealousy of the Sovereign of the respect due to him, that made him regard with lynx-eyed watchfulness even the accidental change of dress in one of his favourites. The least diminution of glossy splendour in a birth-day suit, considered as a mark of slackened duty or waning loyalty, would expose it, tarnished and threadbare, to the keen glance of dormant pride, waked to suspicion. A God does not pene-

trate into the hearts of his worshippers with surer insight, than a King, fond of the attributes of awe and sovereignty, detects the different degrees of fawning adulation in those around him. Every thing relating to external appearance and deportment is scanned with the utmost nicety, as compromising the dignity of the royal presence. Involuntary gestures become overt acts; a look is construed into high treason; an inconsiderate word is magnified into a crime against the State. To suggest advice, or offer information unasked, is to arraign the fallibility of the throne: to hint a difference of opinion to a King, would create as great a shock, as if you were to present a pistol to the breast of any other man. "Never touch a King," was the answer of an infirm monarch to one who had saved him from a dangerous fall. When a glass of wine was presented to the Emperor Alexander by a servant in livery, he started, as if he had trod upon a serpent. Such is their respect for themselves! Such is their opinion of human nature!—"There's a divinity doth hedge a King," that keeps their bodies and their minds



sacred within the magic circle of a name ; and it is their fear lest this circle should be violated or approached without sufficient awe, that makes them observe and remember the countenances of others with such infinite circumspection and exactness.

As Kings have the sagacity of pride, courtiers have the cunning of fear. They watch their own behaviour and that of others with breathless apprehension, and move amidst the artificial forms of court-etiquette, as if the least error must be fatal to them. Their sense of personal propriety is heightened by servility : every faculty is wound up to flatter the vanity and prejudices of their superiors. When Coates painted a portrait in crayons of Queen Charlotte on her first arrival in this country, the King, followed by a train of attendants, went to look at it. The trembling artist stood by. "Well, what do you think?" said the King to those in waiting. Not a word in reply. "Do you think it like?" Still all was hushed as death. "Why, yes," (he added) "I think it is like, very like." A buzz of admiration instantly filled the room ; and the old Duchess

of Northumberland, going up to the artist, and tapping him familiarly on the shoulder, said, "Remember, Mr. Coates, I am to have the first copy!" On another occasion, when the Queen had sat for her portrait, one of the maids of honour coming into the room curtsied to the reflection in the glass, affecting to mistake it for the Queen. The picture was, you may be sure, a flattering likeness. In the Memoirs of Count Grammont, it is related of Louis XIV. that having a dispute at chess with one of his courtiers, no one present would give an opinion. "Oh," said he, "here comes Count Hamilton, he shall decide which of us is in the right."—"Your Majesty is in the wrong," replied the Count, without looking at the board. On which the King remonstrating with him on the impossibility of his judging till he saw the state of the game, he answered, "Does your Majesty suppose that if you were in the right, all these Noblemen would stand by and say nothing?" A King was once curious to know, which was the tallest, himself or a certain courtier. "Let us measure," said the King. The King stood

up to be measured first ; but when the person who was fixed upon to take their height came to measure the Nobleman, he found it quite impossible, as he first rose on tip-toe, then crouched down, now shrugged up his shoulders to the right, then twisted his body to the left. Afterwards his friend asking him the reason of these unaccountable gesticulations, he replied, “I could not tell whether the King wished me to be taller or shorter than himself ; and all the time I was making those odd movements, I was watching his countenance to see what I ought to do.” If such is the exquisite pliability of the inmates of a court in trifles like these, what must be their independence of spirit and disinterested integrity in questions of peace and war, that involve the rights of Sovereigns or the liberties of the people ! It has been suggested (and not without reason) that the difficulty of trusting to the professions of those who surround them, is one circumstance that renders Kings such expert physiognomists, the language of the countenance being the only one they have left to decypher the thoughts of others ; and the

very disguises which are practised to prevent the emotions of the mind from appearing in the face, only rendering them more acute and discriminating observers. It is the same insincerity and fear of giving offence by candour and plain-speaking in their immediate dependants, that makes Kings gossips and inquisitive. They have no way of ascertaining the opinions of others, but by getting them up into a corner, and extorting the commonest information from them, piecemeal, by endless, teasing, tiresome questions and cross-examination. The walls of a palace, like those of a convent, are the favoured abode of scandal and tittle-tattle. The inhabitants of both are equally shut out from the common privileges and common incidents of humanity, and whatever relates to the every-day world about us, has to them the air of a romance. The desire which the most meritorious Princes have shewn to acquire information on matters of fact rather than of opinion, is partly because their prejudices will not suffer them to exercise their understandings freely on the most important speculative questions, partly from

their jealousy of being dictated to on any point that admits of a question;—as, on the other hand, the desire which the Sovereigns of northern and uncultivated kingdoms have shewn to become acquainted with the arts and elegances of life in southern nations, is evidently owing to their natural jealousy of the advantages of civilisation over barbarism. From the principle here stated, Peter the Great visited this country, and worked in our dock-yards as a common ship-wright. To the same source may be traced the curiosity of the Duchess of Oldenburgh to see a beef-steak cooked, to take a peep into Mr. Meux's great brewing-vat, and to hear Mr. Whitbread speak !

The common regal character is then the reverse of what it ought to be. It is the purely *personal*, occupied with its own petty feelings, prejudices, and pursuits ; whereas it ought to be the purely philosophical, exempt from all personal considerations, and contemplating itself only in its general and paramount relation to the State. This is the reason why there have been so few great Kings. They want the power of abstraction : and their si-

tuations are necessarily at variance with their duties in this respect; for every thing forces them to concentrate their attention upon themselves, and to consider their rank and privileges in connection with their private advantage, rather than with public good. This is but natural. It is easier to employ the power they possess in pampering their own appetites and passions, than to wield it for the benefit of a great empire. They see well enough how the community is made for them, not so well how they are made for the community. Not knowing how to act as stewards for their trust, they set up for heirs to the estate, and waste it at their pleasure:—without aspiring to reign as Kings, they are contented to live as *spunges* upon royalty. A great King ought to be the greatest philosopher and the truest patriot in his dominions: hereditary Kings can be but common mortals. It is not that they are not equal to other men, but to be equal to their rank as Kings, they ought to be more than men. Their power is equal to that of the whole community: their wisdom and virtue ought to keep pace with their power. But in

ordinary cases, the height to which they are raised, instead of enlarging their views or ennobling their sentiments, makes them giddy with vanity, and ready to look down on the world which is subjected to their power, as the plaything of their will. They regard men crawling on the face of the earth, as we do the insects that cross our path, and survey the common drama of human life as a fantoccini exhibition got up for their amusement. There is no sympathy between Kings and their subjects; except in a constitutional monarchy like ours through the medium of Lords and Commons. Take away that check upon their ambition and rapacity, and their pretensions become as monstrous as they are ridiculous. Without the common feelings of humanity in their own breasts, they have no regard for them in their aggregate amount and accumulating force. Reigning in contempt of the people, they would crush and trample upon all power but their own. They consider the claims of justice and compassion as so many impertinent interferences with the royal prerogative. They despise the millions of slaves

whom they see linked to the foot of the throne ; and they soon hate what they despise. They will sacrifice a kingdom for a caprice, and mankind for a bauble. Weighed in the scales of their pride, the meanest things become of the greatest importance : weighed in the balance of reason, the universe is nothing to them. It is this overweening, aggravated, intolerable sense of swelling pride and ungovernable self-will, that sometimes disorders their imaginations ; as it is their blind fatuity and insensibility to all beyond themselves, that, transmitted through successive generations and confirmed by regal intermarriages, in time makes them idiots. When we see a poor creature like Ferdinand VII., who can hardly gabble out his words like a human being, more imbecil than a woman, more hypocritical than a priest, decked and dandled in the long robes and swaddling-clothes of Legitimacy, lullabied to rest with the dreams of superstition, drunk with the patriot-blood of his country, and launching the thunders of his coward-arm against the rising liberties of a new world, while he claims the style and title



of Image of the Divinity, we may laugh or weep, but there is nothing to wonder at. Tyrants forego all respect for humanity in proportion as they are sunk beneath it :—taught to believe themselves of a different species, they really become so ; lose their participation with the kind ; and in mimicking the God, dwindle into the brute ! Blind with prejudices as a mole, stung with truth as with scorpions, sore all over with wounded pride like a boil, their minds a morbid heap of proud flesh and bloated humours, a disease and gangrene in the State, instead of its life-blood and vital principle ;—foreign despots claim mankind as their property, “independently of their conduct or merits,” and there is one Englishman found base enough to echo the foul calumny against his country and his kind.

We might, in the same manner, account for the disparity between the public and private character of Kings. It is the misfortune of most Kings (not their fault) to be born to thrones, a situation which ordinary talents or virtue cannot fill with impunity. We often find a very respectable man make but a very

̄sorry figure as a Sovereign. Nay, a Prince may be possessed of extraordinary virtues and accomplishments, and not be more thought of for them. He may, for instance, be a man of good-nature and good manners, graceful in his person, the idol of the other sex, the model of his own; every word or look may be marked with the utmost sense of propriety and delicate attention to the feelings of others; he may be a good classic, well versed in history—may speak Italian, French, Spanish, and German fluently; he may be an excellent mimic; he may say good things, and do friendly ones; he may be able to join in a catch, or utter a repartee, or dictate a billet-doux; he may be master of Hoyle, and deep in the rules of the Jockey Club; he may have an equal taste in ragouts and poetry, in dancing and in dress; he may adjust a toupee with the dexterity of a friseur, or tie a cravat with the hand and eye of a man-milliner: he may have all these graces and accomplishments, and as many more, and yet he may be nothing; as without any one of them he may be a great Prince. They are not the graces

and accomplishments of a Sovereign, but of a Lord of the Bedchamber. They do not shew a great mind, bent on great objects, and swayed by lofty views. They are rather foibles and blemishes in the character of a ruler ; for they imply that his attention has been turned as much upon adorning his own person as upon advancing the State. Charles II. was a King, such as we have here described ; amiable, witty, and accomplished, and yet his memory is equally despised and detested. Charles was without strength of mind or public principle. He could not arrive at the comprehension of that mixed mass of thought and feeling, a *kingdom*—he thought merely of the *throne*. He was as unlike Cromwell in the manner in which he came by the Sovereignty of the realm as in the use he made of it. He saw himself, not in the glass of history, but in the glass on his toilette,—not in the eyes of posterity, but of his courtiers and mistresses. Instead of regulating his conduct by public opinion and abstract reason, he did every thing from a feeling of personal convenience. Charles would have been more annoyed with

the rejection of a licentious overture than with the rebellion of a province; and poured out the blood of his subjects with the same gaiety and indifference as he did a glass of wine. He had no idea of his obligations to the State, and only laid aside the private gentleman to become the tyrant of his people. Charles was popular in his life-time, Cibber tells us, because he used to walk out with his spaniels and feed his ducks in St. James's Park. History has consigned his name to infamy for the executions under Jeffries, and for his league with a legitimate despot, to undermine the liberties of his country.

What is it, then, that makes a great Prince? Not the understanding Purcell or Mozart, but the having an ear open to the voice of truth and justice! Not a taste in made-dishes, or French wines, or court-dresses, but a fellow-feeling with the calamities of hunger, of cold, of disease, and nakedness! Not a knowledge of the elegances of fashionable life, but a heart that feels for the millions of its fellow-beings in want of the common necessities of life! Not a set of brilliant frivolous accom-

plishments, but a manly strength of character, proof against the seductions of a throne ! He, in short, is a patriot King, who without any other faculty usually possessed by Sovereigns, has one which they seldom possess,—the power in imagination of changing places with his people. Such a King may indeed aspire to the character of a ruling providence over a nation ; any other is but the head-cypher of a court !

ON THE CONDUCT OF LIFE ;  
OR,  
ADVICE TO A SCHOOLBOY.

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MY DEAR LITTLE FELLOW,

You are now going to settle at school, and may consider this as your first entrance into the world. As my health is so indifferent, and I may not be with you long, I wish to leave you some advice (the best I can) for your conduct in life, both that it may be of use to you, and as something to remember me by. I may at least be able to caution you against my own errors, if nothing else.

As we went along to your new place of destination, you often repeated that “you durst say they were a set of stupid, disagree-

able people," meaning the people at the school. You were to blame in this. It is a good old rule to hope for the best. Always, my dear, believe things to be right, till you find them the contrary; and even then, instead of irritating yourself against them, endeavour to put up with them as well as you can, if you cannot alter them. You said "You were sure you should not like the school where you were going." This was wrong. What you meant was that you did not like to leave home. But you could not tell whether you should like the school or not, till you had given it a trial. Otherwise, your saying that you should not like it was determining that you would not like it. Never anticipate evils; or, because you cannot have things exactly as you wish, make them out worse than they are, through mere spite and wilfulness.

You seemed at first to take no notice of your school-fellows, or rather to set yourself against them, because they were strangers to you. They knew as little of you as you did of them; so that this would have been a reason for their keeping aloof from you as well, which you

would have felt as a hardship. Learn never to conceive a prejudice against others, because you know nothing of them. It is bad reasoning, and makes enemies of half the world. Do not think ill of them, till they behave ill to you; and then strive to avoid the faults which you see in them. This will disarm their hostility sooner than pique or resentment or complaint.

I thought you were disposed to criticise the dress of some of the boys as not so good as your own. Never despise any one for any thing that he cannot help—least of all, for his poverty. I would wish you to keep up appearances yourself as a defence against the idle sneers of the world, but I would not have you value yourself upon them. I hope you will neither be the dupe nor victim of vulgar prejudices. Instead of saying above—“Never despise any one for any thing that he cannot help”—I might have said, “Never despise any one at all;” for contempt implies a triumph over and pleasure in the ill of another. It means that you are glad and congratulate yourself on their failings or misfortunes. The



sense of inferiority in others, without this indirect appeal to our self-love, is a painful feeling, and not an exulting one.

You complain since, that the boys laugh at you and do not care about you, and that you are not treated as you were at home. My dear, that is one chief reason for your being sent to school, to inure you betimes to the unavoidable rubs and uncertain reception you may meet with in life. You cannot always be with me, and perhaps it is as well that you cannot. But you must not expect others to shew the same concern about you as I should. You have hitherto been a spoiled child, and have been used to have your own way a good deal, both in the house and among your play-fellows, with whom you were too fond of being a leader: but you have good nature and good sense, and will get the better of this in time. You have now got among other boys who are your equals, or bigger and stronger than yourself, and who have something else to attend to besides humouring your whims and fancies, and you feel this as a repulse or piece of injustice. But the first lesson to

learn is that there are other people in the world besides yourself. There are a number of boys in the school where you are, whose amusements and pursuits (whatever they may be) are and ought to be of as much consequence to them as yours can be to you, and to which therefore you must give way in your turn. The more airs of childish self-importance you give yourself, you will only expose yourself to be the more thwarted and laughed at. True equality is the only true morality or true wisdom. Remember always that you are but one among others, and you can hardly mistake your place in society. In your father's house, you might do as you pleased : in the world, you will find competitors at every turn. You are not born a king's son to destroy or dictate to millions : you can only expect to share their fate, or settle your differences amicably with them. You already find it so at school ; and I wish you to be reconciled to your situation as soon and with as little pain as you can.

It was my misfortune (perhaps) to be bred up among Dissenters, who look with too

jaundiced an eye at others, and set too high a value on their own peculiar pretensions. From being proscribed themselves, they learn to proscribe others; and come in the end to reduce all integrity of principle and soundness of opinion within the pale of their own little communion. Those who were out of it, and did not belong to the class of *Rational Dissenters*, I was led erroneously to look upon as hardly deserving the name of rational beings. Being thus satisfied as to the select few who are “the salt of the earth,” it is easy to persuade ourselves that we are at the head of them, and to fancy ourselves of more importance in the scale of true desert than all the rest of the world put together, who do not interpret a certain text of Scripture in the manner that we have been taught to do. You will (from the difference of education) be free from this bigotry, and will, I hope, avoid every thing akin to the same exclusive and narrow-minded spirit. Think that the minds of men are various as their faces—that the modes and employments of life are numberless as they are necessary—that there is

more than one class of merit—that though others may be wrong in some things, they are not so in all—and that countless races of men have been born, have lived and died without ever hearing of any one of those points in which you take a just pride and pleasure—and you will not err on the side of that spiritual pride or intellectual coxcombry which has been so often the bane of the studious and learned!

I observe you have got a way of speaking of your school-fellows as “*that* Hoare, *that* Harris,” and so on, as if you meant to mark them out for particular reprobation, or did not think them good enough for you. It is a bad habit to speak disrespectfully of others; for it will lead you to think and feel uncharitably towards them. Ill names beget ill blood. Even where there may be some repeated trifling provocation, it is better to be courteous, mild, and forbearing, than capacious, impatient, and fretful. The faults of others too often arise out of our own ill temper; or though they should be real, we shall not mend them, by exasperating ourselves

against them. Treat your play-mates, as Hamlet advises Polonius to treat the players, "according to your own dignity, rather than their deserts." If you fly out at every thing in them that you disapprove or think done on purpose to annoy you, you lie constantly at the mercy of their caprice, rudeness, or ill-nature. You should be more your own master.

Do not begin to quarrel with the world too soon : for, bad as it may be, it is the best we have to live in—here. If railing would have made it better, it would have been reformed long ago : but as this is not to be hoped for at present, the best way is to slide through it as contentedly and innocently as we may. The worst fault it has, is want of charity : and calling *knave* and *fool* at every turn will not cure this failing. Consider (as a matter of vanity) that if there were not so many knaves and fools as we find, the wise and honest would not be those rare and shining characters that they are allowed to be; and (as a matter of philosophy) that if the world be really incorrigible in this respect, it is a re-

fection to make one sad, not angry. We may laugh or weep at the madness of mankind : we have no right to vilify them, for our own sakes or theirs. Misanthropy is not the disgust of the mind at human nature, but with itself ; or it is laying its own exaggerated vices and foul blots at the door of others ! Do not, however, mistake what I have here said. I would not have you, when you grow up, adopt the low and sordid fashion of palliating existing abuses or of putting the best face upon the worst things. I only mean that indiscriminate, unqualified satire can do little good, and that those who indulge in the most revolting speculations on human nature, do not themselves always set the fairest examples, or strive to prevent its lower degradation. They seem rather willing to reduce it to their theoretical standard. For the rest, the very outcry that is made (if sincere) shews that things cannot be quite so bad as they are represented. The abstract hatred and scorn of vice implies the capacity for virtue : the impatience expressed at the most striking instances of deformity proves the in-

nate idea and love of beauty in the human mind. The best antidote I can recommend to you hereafter against the disheartening effect of such writings as those of Rochefoucault, Mandeville, and others, will be to look at the pictures of Raphael and Correggio. You need not be altogether ashamed, my dear little boy, of belonging to a species which could produce such faces as those; nor despair of doing something worthy of a laudable ambition, when you see what such hands have wrought! You will, perhaps, one day have reason to thank me for this advice.

As to your studies and school-exercises, I wish you to learn Latin, French, and dancing. I would insist upon the last more particularly, both because it is more likely to be neglected, and because it is of the greatest consequence to your success in life. Every thing almost depends upon first impressions; and these depend (besides *person*, which is not in our power) upon two things, *dress* and *address*, which every one may command with proper attention. These are the small coin in the intercourse of life, which are conti-

ually in request ; and perhaps you will find at the year's end, or towards the close of life, that the daily insults, coldness, or contempt to which you have been exposed by a neglect of such superficial recommendations are hardly atoned for by the few proofs of esteem or admiration which your integrity or talents have been able to extort in the course of it. When we habitually disregard those things which we know will ensure the favourable opinion of others, it shews we set that opinion at defiance, or consider ourselves above it, which no one ever did with impunity. An inattention to our own persons implies a disrespect to others, and may often be traced no less to a want of good-nature than of good sense. The old maxim—*Desire to please, and you will infallibly please*—explains the whole matter. If there is a tendency to vanity and affectation on this side of the question, there is an equal alloy of pride and obstinacy on the opposite one.—Slovenliness may at any time be cured by an effort of resolution, but a graceful carriage requires an early habit, and, in most cases, the aid of the



dancing-master. I would not have you, from not knowing how to enter a room properly, stumble at the very threshold in the good graces of those on whom it is possible the fate of your future life may depend. Nothing creates a greater prejudice against any one than awkwardness. A person who is confused in manner and gesture seems to have done something wrong, or as if he was conscious of no one qualification to build a confidence in himself upon. On the other hand, openness, freedom, self-possession, set others at ease with you by shewing that you are on good terms with yourself. Grace in women gains the affections sooner, and secures them longer, than any thing else—it is an outward and visible sign of an inward harmony of soul—as the want of it in men, as if the mind and body equally hitched in difficulties and were distracted with doubts, is the greatest impediment in the career of gallantry and road to the female heart. Another thing I would caution you against is not to pore over your books till you are bent almost double—a habit you will never be able to get the better

of, and which you will find of serious ~~ill~~ consequence. *A stoop in the shoulders* sinks a man in public and in private estimation. You are at present straight enough, and you walk with boldness and spirit. Do nothing to take away the use of your limbs, or the spring and elasticity of your muscles. As to all worldly advantages, it is to the full of as much importance that your deportment should be erect and manly as your actions.

You will naturally find out all this and fall into it, if your attention is drawn out sufficiently to what is passing around you; and this will be the case, unless you are absorbed too much in books and those sedentary studies,

“Which waste the marrow, and consume the brain.”

You are, I think, too fond of reading, as it is. As one means of avoiding excess in this way, I would wish you to make it a rule, never to read at meal-times, nor in company when there is any (even the most trivial) conversation going on, nor ever to let your eagerness to learn encroach upon your play-

hours." Books are but one inlet of knowledge; and the pores of the mind, like those of the body, should be left open to all impressions. I applied too close to my studies, soon after I was of your age, and hurt myself irreparably by it. Whatever may be the value of learning, health and good spirits are of more.

I would have you, as I said, make yourself master of French, because you may find it of use in the commerce of life; and I would have you learn Latin, partly because I learnt it myself, and I would not have you without any of the advantages or sources of knowledge that I possessed—it would be a bar of separation between us—and secondly, because there is an atmosphere round this sort of classical ground, to which that of actual life is gross and vulgar. Shut out from this garden of early sweetness, we may well exclaim—

“How shall we part and wander down  
Into a lower world, to this obscure  
And wild? How shall we breathe in other air  
Less pure, accusom'd to immortal fruits?”

I do not think the Classics so indispensable to the cultivation of your intellect as on another

account, which I have explained elsewhere, and you will have no objection to turn with me to the passage.

“The study of the Classics is less to be regarded as an exercise of the intellect, than as *a discipline of humanity*. The peculiar advantage of this mode of education consists not so much in strengthening the understanding, as in softening and refining the taste. It gives men liberal views; it accustoms the mind to take an interest in things foreign to itself; to love virtue for its own sake; to prefer fame to life, and glory to riches; and to fix our thoughts on the remote and permanent, instead of narrow and fleeting objects. It teaches us to believe that there is something really great and excellent in the world, surviving all the shocks of accident and fluctuations of opinion, and raises us above that low and servile fear, which bows only to present power and upstart authority. Rome and Athens filled a place in the history of mankind, which can never be occupied again. They were two cities set on a hill, which could not be hid; all eyes have seen them,

and ~~their~~ light, shines like a mighty sea-mark  
into the abyss of time.

“ Still green with bays each ancient altar stands,  
Above the reach of sacrilegious hands ;  
Secure from flames, from envy’s fiercer rage,  
Destructive war, and all-involving age.  
Hail, bards triumphant, born in happier days,  
Immortal heirs of universal praise !  
Whose honours with increase of ages grow,  
As streams roll down, enlarging as they flow !”

It is this feeling more than any thing else which produces a marked difference between the study of the ancient and modern languages, and which, by the weight and importance of the consequences attached to the former, stamps every word with a monumental firmness. By conversing with the *mighty dead*, we imbibe sentiment with knowledge. We become strongly attached to those who can no longer either hurt or serve us, except through the influence which they exert over the mind. We feel the presence of that power which gives immortality to human thoughts and actions, and catch the flame of enthusiasm from all nations and ages.”

· Because, however, you have learnt Latin and Greek, and can speak a different language, do not fancy yourself of a different order of beings from those you ordinarily converse with. They perhaps know and can do more *things* than you, though you have learnt a greater variety of *names* to express the same thing by. The great object indeed of these studies is to be “a cure for a narrow and selfish spirit,” and to carry the mind out of its petty and local prejudices to the idea of a more general humanity. Do not fancy, because you are intimate with Homer and Virgil, that your neighbours who can never attain the same posthumous fame are to be despised, like those impudent valets who live in noble families and look down upon every one else. Though you are master of Cicero’s *Orations*, think it possible for a cobbler at a stall to be more eloquent than you. “But you are a scholar, and he is not.” Well, then, you have that advantage over him, but it does not follow that you are to have every other. Look at the heads of the celebrated poets and philosophers of anti-

quity in the collection at Wilton, and you will say they answer to their works : but you will find others in the same collection whose names have hardly come down to us, that are equally fine, and cast in the same classic mould. Do you imagine that all the thoughts, genius, and capacity of those old and mighty nations are contained in a few odd volumes, to be thumbed by school-boys? This reflection is not meant to lessen your admiration of the great names to which you will be accustomed to look up, but to direct it to that solid mass of intellect and power, of which they were the most shining ornaments. I would wish you to excel in this sort of learning and to take a pleasure in it, because it is the path that has been chosen for you : but do not suppose that others do not excel equally in their line of study or exercise of skill, or that there is but one mode of excellence in art or nature. You have got on vastly beyond the point at which you set out ; but others have been getting on as well as you in the same or other ways, and have kept pace with you. What then, you may

ask, is the use of all the pains you have taken, if it gives you no superiority over mankind in general? It is this—You have reaped all the benefit of improvement and knowledge yourself; and farther, if you had not moved forwards, you would by this time have been left behind. Envy no one, disparage no one, think yourself above no one. Their demerits will not piece out your deficiencies; nor is it a waste of time and labour for you to cultivate your own talents, because you cannot bespeak a monopoly of all advantages. You are more learned than many of your acquaintance who may be more active, healthy, witty, successful in business or expert in some elegant or useful art than you; but you have no reason to complain, if you have attained the object of your ambition. Or if you should not be able to compass this from a want of genius or parts, yet learn, my child, to be contented with a mediocrity of acquirements. You may still be respectable in your conduct, and enjoy a tranquil obscurity, with more friends and fewer enemies than you might otherwise have had.



There is one almost certain drawback on a course of scholastic study, that it unfits men for active life. The *ideal* is always at variance with the *practical*. The habit of fixing the attention on the imaginary and abstracted deprives the mind equally of energy and fortitude. By indulging our imaginations on fictions and chimeras, where we have it all our own way and are led on only by the pleasure of the prospect, we grow fastidious, effeminate, lapped in idle luxury, impatient of contradiction, and unable to sustain the shock of real adversity, when it comes; as by being taken up with abstract reasoning or remote events in which we are merely passive spectators, we have no resources to provide against it, no readiness, or expedients for the occasion, or spirit to use them, even if they occur. We must think again before we determine, and thus the opportunity for action is lost. While we are considering the very best possible mode of gaining an object, we find that it has slipped through our fingers, or that others have laid rude, fearless hands upon it. The

youthful tyro reluctantly discovers that, the ways of the world are not his ways, nor their thoughts his thoughts. Perhaps the old monastic institutions were not in this respect unwise, which carried on to the end of life the secluded habits and romantic associations with which it began, and which created a privileged world for the inhabitants, distinct from the common world of men and women. You will bring with you from your books and solitary reveries a wrong measure of men and things, unless you correct it by careful experience and mixed observation. You will raise your standard of character as much too high at first as from disappointed expectation it will sink too low afterwards. The best qualifier of this theoretical *mania* and of the dreams of poets and moralists (who both treat of things as *they ought to be* and not as *they are*) is in one sense to be found in some of our own popular writers, such as our Novelists and periodical Essayists. But you had, after all, better wait and see what things are than try to anticipate the results. You know more of a road by having travelled it than by

all the ~~conjectures~~ conjectures and descriptions in the world. You will find the business of life conducted on a much more varied and individual scale than you would expect. People will be concerned about a thousand things that you have no idea of, and will be utterly indifferent to what you feel the greatest interest in. You will find good and evil, folly and discretion more mingled, and the shades of character running more into each other than they do in the ethical charts. No one is equally wise or guarded at all points, and it is seldom that any one is quite a fool. Do not be surprised, when you go out into the world, to find men talk exceedingly well on different subjects, who do not derive their information immediately from books. In the first place, the light of books is diffused very much abroad in the world in conversation and at second-hand; and besides, common sense is not a monopoly, and experience and observation are sources of information open to the man of the world as well as to the retired student. If you know more of the outline and principles, he knows more of the

details and “practique part of life.” A man may discuss the adventures of a campaign in which he was engaged very agreeably without having read the *Retreat of the Ten Thousand*, or give a singular account of the method of drying teas in China without being a profound chemist. It is the vice of scholars to suppose that there is no knowledge in the world but that of books. Do you avoid it, I conjure you; and thereby save yourself the pain and mortification that must ensue from finding out your mistake continually!

Gravity is one great ingredient in the conduct of life, and perhaps a certain share of it is hardly to be dispensed with. Few people can afford to be quite unaffected. At any rate, do not put your worst qualities foremost. Do not seek to distinguish yourself by being ridiculous; nor entertain that miserable ambition to be the sport and butt of the company. By aiming at a certain standard of behaviour or intellect, you will at least shew your taste and value for what is excellent. There are those who *blurt* out their good things with so little heed of what they are about that

no one thinks any thing of them; as others by keeping their folly to themselves gain the reputation of wisdom. Do not, however, affect to speak only in oracles, or to deal in *bon-mots* : condescend to the level of the company, and be free and accessible to all persons. Express whatever occurs to you, that cannot offend others or hurt yourself. Keep some opinions to yourself. Say what you please of others, but never repeat what you hear said of them to themselves. If you have nothing better to offer, laugh with the witty, assent to the wise : they will not think the worse of you for it. Listen to information on subjects you are unacquainted with, instead of always striving to lead the conversation to some favourite one of your own. By the last method you will shine, but will not improve. I am ashamed myself ever to open my lips on any question I have ever written upon. It is much more difficult to be able to converse on an equality with a number of persons in turn, than to soar above their heads, and excite the stupid gaze of all companies by bestriding some senseless topic of your own

and confounding the understandings of those who are ignorant of it. Be not too fond of argument. Indeed, by going much into company (which I do not, however, wish you to do) you will be weaned from this practice, if you set out with it. Rather suggest what remarks may have occurred to you on a subject than aim at dictating your opinions to others or at defending yourself at all points. You will learn more by agreeing in the main with others and entering into their trains of thinking, than by contradicting and urging them to extremities. Avoid singularity of opinion as well as of every thing else. Sound conclusions come with practical knowledge, rather than with speculative refinements : in what we really understand, we reason but little. Long-winded disputes fill up the place of common sense and candid inquiry.' Do not imagine that you will make people friends by shewing your superiority over them : it is what they will neither admit nor forgive, unless you have a high and acknowledged reputation beforehand, which renders this sort of petty vanity more inexcusable. Seek to

gain the good-will of others, rather than to extort their applause; and to this end, be neither too tenacious of your own claims, nor inclined to press too hard on their weaknesses.

Do not affect the society of your inferiors in rank, nor court that of the great. There can be no real sympathy in either case. The first will consider you as a restraint upon them, and the last as an intruder or *upon sufferance*. It is not a desirable distinction to be admitted into company as a man of talents. You are a mark for invidious observation. If you say nothing or merely behave with common propriety and simplicity, you seem to have no business there. If you make a studied display of yourself, it is arrogating a consequence you have no right to. If you are contented to pass as an indifferent person, they despise you; if you distinguish yourself, and shew more knowledge, wit, or taste than they do, they hate you for it. You have no alternative. I would rather be asked out to sing than to talk. Every one does not pretend to a fine voice, but every one fancies he has as much understanding as

another. Indeed, the secret of this sort of intercourse has been pretty well found out. Literary men are seldom invited to the tables of the great; they send for players and musicians, as they keep monkeys and parrots!

I would not, however, have you run away with a notion that the rich are knaves or that lords are fools. They are for what I know as honest and as wise as other people. But it is a trick of our self-love, supposing that another has the decided advantage of us in one way, to strike a balance by taking it for granted (as a moral antithesis) that he must be as much beneath us in those qualities on which we plume ourselves, and which we would appropriate almost entirely to our own use. It is hard indeed if others are raised above us not only by the gifts of fortune, but of understanding too. It is not to be credited. People have an unwillingness to admit that the House of Lords can be equal in talent to the House of Commons. So in the other sex, if a woman is handsome, she is an idiot or no better than she should be: in ours, if a man is worth a million of money, he is a miser, a fellow that



cannot spell his own name, or a poor creature in some way, to bring him to our level. This is malice, and not truth. Believe all the good you can of every one. Do not measure others by yourself. If they have advantages which you have not, let your liberality keep pace with their good fortune. Envy no one, and you need envy no one. If you have but the magnanimity to allow merit wherever you see it—understanding in a lord or wit in a cobbler—this temper of mind will stand you instead of many accomplishments. Think no man too happy. Raphael died young: Milton had the misfortune to be blind. If any one is vain or proud, it is from folly or ignorance. Those who pique themselves excessively on some one thing, have but that one thing to pique themselves upon, as languages, mechanics, *etc.* I do not say that this is not an enviable delusion where it is not liable to be disturbed; but at present knowledge is too much diffused and pretensions come too much into collision for this to be long the case; and it is better not to form such a prejudice at first than to have it to undo all the rest of one's life. If

you learn any two things, though they may put you out of conceit one with the other, they will effectually cure you of any conceit you might have of yourself, by shewing the variety and scope there is in the human mind beyond the limits you had set to it.

You were convinced the first day that you could not learn Latin, which now you find easy. Be taught from this, not to think other obstacles insurmountable, that you may meet with in the course of your life, though they seem so at first sight.

Attend above all things to your health; or rather, do nothing wilfully to impair it. Use exercise, abstinence, and regular hours. Drink water when you are alone, and wine or very little spirits in company. ~~It is the last that~~ are ruinous by leading to unlimited excess. There is not the same headlong *impetus* in wine. But one glass of brandy and water makes you want another, that other makes you want a third, and so on, in an increased proportion. Therefore no one can stop midway who does not possess the resolution to abstain altogether; for the inclination is shar-

pened with its indulgence. Never gamble. Or if you play for any thing, never do so for what will give you uneasiness the next day. Be not precise in these matters : but do not pass certain limits, which it is difficult to recover. Do nothing in the irritation of the moment, but take time to reflect. Because you have done one foolish thing, do not do another ; nor throw away your health or reputation or comfort, to thwart impertinent advice. Avoid a spirit of contradiction, both in words and actions. Do not aim at what is beyond your reach, but at what is within it. Indulge in calm and pleasing pursuits, rather than violent excitements ; and learn to conquer your own will, instead of striving to obtain the mastery of that of others.

With respect to your friends, I would wish you to choose them neither from caprice nor accident, and to adhere to them as long as you can. Do not take a surfeit of friendship, through over-sanguine enthusiasm, nor expect it to last for ever. Always speak well of those with whom you have once been intimate, or take some part of the censure you bestow on

them to yourself. Never quarrel with tried friends, or those whom you wish to continue such. Wounds of this kind are sure to open again. When once the prejudice is removed that sheathes defects, familiarity only causes jealousy and distrust. Do not keep on with a mockery of friendship after the substance is gone—but part, while you can part friends. Bury the carcase of friendship: it is not worth embalming.

As to the books you will have to read by choice ~~or~~ for amusement, the best are the commonest. The names of many of them are already familiar to you. Read them as you grow up with all the satisfaction in your power, and make much of them. It is perhaps the ~~greatest pleasure you will have~~ in life, the one you will think of longest, and repent of least. If my life had been more full of calamity than it has been (much more than I hope yours will be) I would live it over again, my poor little boy, to have read the books I did in my youth.

In politics I wish you to be an honest man, but no brawler. Hate injustice and falsehood

for your own sake. Be neither a martyr, nor a sycophant. Wish well to the world without expecting to see it much better than it is ; and do not gratify the enemies of liberty by putting yourself at their mercy, if it can be avoided with honour.

If you ever marry, I would wish you to marry the woman you like. Do not be guided by the recommendation of friends. Nothing will atone for or overcome an original distaste. It will only increase from intimacy ; and if you are to live separate, it is better not to come together. There is no use in dragging a chain through life, unless it binds one to the object we love. Chuse a mistress from among your equals. You will be able to understand her character better, and she will be more likely to understand yours. Those in an inferior station to yourself will doubt your good intentions, and misapprehend your plainest expressions. All that you swear is to them a riddle or downright nonsense. You cannot by possibility translate your thoughts into their dialect. They will be ignorant of the meaning of

half you say, and laugh at the rest. As mistresses, they will have no sympathy with you; and as wives, you can have none with them. But they will do all they can to thwart you, and to retrieve themselves in their own opinion by trick and low cunning. No woman ever married into a family above herself that did not try to make all the mischief she could in it.—Be not in haste to marry, nor to engage your affections, where there is no probability of a return. Do not fancy every woman you see the heroine of a romance, a Sophia Western, a Clarissa, or a Julia; and yourself the potential hero of it, Tom Jones, Lovelace, or St. Preux. Avoid this error as you would shrink back from a precipice. All your fine sentiments and romantic notions will (of themselves) make no more impression on one of these delicate creatures, than on a piece of marble. Their soft bosoms are steel to your amorous refinements, if you have no other pretensions. It is not what you think of them that determines their choice, but what they think of you. Endeavour, if you would escape lin-

gering torments and the gnawing of the worm that dies not, to find out this, and to abide by the issue. We trifle with, make sport of, and despise those who are attached to us, and follow those that fly from us. "We hunt the wind, we worship a statue, cry aloud to the desert." Do you, my dear boy, stop short in this career, if you find yourself setting out in it, and make up your mind to this, that if a woman does not like you of her own accord, that is, from involuntary impressions, nothing you can say or do or suffer for her sake will make her, but will set her the more against you. So the song goes—

"Quit, quit for shame; this will not move :

If of herself she will not love,

Nothing will make her love, ~~nothing will make her love~~"

There is but one other point on which I meant to speak to you, and that is the choice of a profession. This, probably, had better be left to time or accident or your own inclination. You have a very fine ear, but I have somehow a prejudice against men-singers, and indeed against the stage altogether. It is an uncertain and ungrateful soil. All

professions are bad that depend on reputation, which is "as often got without merit as lost without deserving." Yet I cannot easily reconcile myself to your being a slave to business, and I shall hardly be able to leave you an independence. A situation in a public office is secure, but laborious and mechanical, and without the two great springs of life, Hope and Fear. Perhaps, however, it might ensure you a competence, and leave you leisure for some other favourite amusement or pursuit. I have said all reputation is hazardous, hard to win, harder to keep. Many never attain a glimpse of what they have all their lives been looking for, and others survive a passing shadow of it. Yet if I were to name one pursuit rather than another, I should wish you to be a good painter, if such a thing could be hoped. I have failed in this myself, and should wish you to be able to do what I have not—to paint like Claude or Rembrandt or Guido or Vandyke, if it were possible. Artists, I think, who have succeeded in their chief object, live to be old, and are agreeable old men. Their minds keep alive to the



last. Cosway's spirits never flagged till after ninety, and Nollekens, though blind, passed all his mornings in giving directions about some group or bust in his workshop. You have seen Mr.——, that delightful specimen of the last age. With what avidity he takes up his pencil, or lays it down again to talk of numberless things! His eye has not lost its lustre, nor "paled its ineffectual fire." His body is a shadow : he himself is a pure spirit. There is a kind of immortality about this sort of ideal and visionary existence that dallies with Fate and baffles the grim monster, Death. If I thought you could make as clever an artist and arrive at such an agreeable old age as Mr.——, I should declare at once for your devoting ~~yourself to this enchanting~~ profession; and in that reliance, should feel less regret at some of my own disappointments, and little anxiety on your account!









